$20M in Federal Funds to Help Community Health Centers End HIV

As the U.S. Health Department announces the new HIV funds, the White House releases its plan to implement the National HIV/AIDS Strategy.

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Some 64 community health centers will receive a total of more than $20 million in federal funding to expand their efforts to prevent, test for and treat HIV. The funds were awarded by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), a division of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The funding supports the federal Ending the HIV Epidemic (EHE) initiative, which aims to reduce new HIV cases in the country by 75% by 2025 and by 90% by 2030.

Health Secretary Xavier Becerra announced the funding during the National Ryan White Conference on HIV Care and Treatment on August 23. A list of the 64 health centers can be found on HRSA.gov.

In related HIV news, the White House recently published a federal implementation plan for the National HIV/AIDS Strategy, which was updated last year. Although the national strategy and the Ending the Epidemic initiative share similar goals, they lay out different paths. You can read and download a PDF of the 76-page plan here.

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“Our National HI/AIDS Strategy included goals and objectives and some strategies for how we can end the HIV epidemic in the United States, but the implementation plan captures some of the major activities that our federal partners will engage in up to the year 2025 to help move us forward,” explained Harold Phillips, MRP, the director of the White House Office of National AIDS Policy. You can watch him discuss the plan in the video at the top of this article or on HIV.gov’s YouTube channel.

“I hope that this document inspires our private sector, our academic institutions, [and] our faith-based partners to really understand what the federal government plans to do,” he added. “The implementation plan is a companion document to the [NHAS]. So [we have] the framework, and then we [have] federal action; now we need the rest of society to come together and activate and accelerate like President Biden called us to do to end the HIV epidemic.”

The national strategy, which builds on previous ones. was updated on World AIDS Day, December 1, and offers a road map for fighting HIV from 2022 to 2025. The first one was launched in 2010 by the Obama administration. To learn more about the new strategy and how it centers people with HIV and addresses racism, read the feature “What’s New in the Updated National HIV/AIDS Strategy?”

Meanwhile, the HHS funding, part of the Ending the Epidemic plan will go to local health centers. According to HIV.gov, centers that receive funding “will leverage it to expand access to medication to prevent HIV (including pre-exposure prophylaxis, or PrEP, and related services), connect people to care and ensure care services are well coordinated. They will also leverage it to strengthen partnerships with community organizations, such as HRSA’s Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program–funded organizations and health departments. Stronger partnerships speed up patients’ connections to prevention services, including testing and PrEP.”

“Community health centers are critical to preventing and treating HIV, especially when it comes to reaching underserved communities,” said Becerra. “Today’s awards will ensure high-quality HIV prevention, testing and treatment services are more readily available for Americans who need it the most.”

For its coverage of the funding, the Bay Area Reporter in San Francisco spoke with several leaders of community health centers. “As we saw with COVID-19, and now monkeypox, health centers have a unique ability to reach communities that have long been marginalized and underserved by the broader health care system—low-income communities, LGBTQ+ communities and communities of color,” Craig E. Thompson, CEO of APLA Health in Los Angeles, told the newspaper.

“APLA Health was grateful to be one of the first health centers funded as part of the federal EHE initiative in 2020. This additional funding has allowed us to expand HIV testing and link hundreds of Black and Latino gay and bisexual men and transgender individuals to PrEP. We applaud the Biden administration for continuing to build on this important program and funding even more health centers nationwide.”

EHE was launched in 2019 by President Donald Trump. If it reaches its goals, there would be fewer than 3,000 HIV cases a year. “Reducing new infections to this level,” according to the initiative, “would essentially mean that HIV transmissions would be rare and meet the definition of ending the epidemic.”

The strategy for reaching these benchmarks involves investing federal funding and resources in programs such as Rapid Start and PrEP in 57 key jurisdictions. These are the 48 counties nationwide plus Washington, DC; San Juan, Puerto Rico; and seven rural states with high HIV burdens (Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, Oklahoma and South Carolina) that together account for 50% of new HIV cases.

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