$5M in Federal Funds to End HIV and Hepatitis C Among American Indians

Here's how the funding will reach American Indians and Alaska Natives, who see higher rates of HIV, hepatitis C and STIs.

May 2, 2022 By Trent Straube

Efforts to end HIV and hepatitis C among American Indians and Alaska Natives just got a $5 million boost in new federal funding, according to an announcement on HIV.gov. The money will help achieve the goals of the national Ending the HIV Epidemic in the United States initiative and the National HIIV/AIDS Strategy. More specifically, the funds will support the programs and activities of the Indian Health Services, an agency within the Department of Health and Human Services that delivers health services to the nearly 2.7 million American Indians and Alaska Natives in the 574 federally recognized tribes in 37 states.

The funding is being divided approximately as follows:

- $2.48 million distributed through 14 grants that will be awarded to tribes, tribal groups or Indian organizations whose work addresses HIV and related issues, such as hepatitis C and sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

- $1.5 million to support clinical training, including funding for ongoing case-based training and technical assistance

- $620,000 to support national infrastructure

- $400,000 to support a national media campaign.

Groups interested in applying for the 14 grants (awarded for three years) must apply by June 17. For more information on this funding opportunity, click on this Indian Health Services announcement.

#ICYMI: @IHSgov announced $5 million in #funding for Ending the HIV Epidemic in the U.S. Read the full press release on the @HIVgov blog: https://t.co/VXYa1sagmH #EndHIVepidemic pic.twitter.com/grKsapQ1v5

— HIV.gov (@HIVGov) April 28, 2022

HIV continues to have a disproportionate impact on Native communities, including American Indians, Alaska Natives, American Indians and Native Hawaiians. The issue is highlighted each year on the first day of spring, which also marks National Native HIV/AIDS Awareness Day (#NNHAAD).

As the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) notes, HIV treatment and prevention among Native communities can be uniquely challenging because each tribe has its own culture, beliefs and practices. In addition, many Native people experience stigma, poverty, alcohol and illicit drug use and high rates of STIs (in 2018, American Indian and Alaska Natives had the second highest rates of chlamydia and gonorrhea among all racial/ethnic groups).

New #HIV diagnoses among American Indians/Alaska Natives are trending upwards again, rising 11% between 2018 and 2019. This #NNHAAD, learn more about the disproportionate impact of HIV on this underserved community: https://t.co/LYsmO9AQMD pic.twitter.com/tIpLV6E5KK

— AIDSVu (@AIDSVu) March 17, 2022

To help raise awareness of these issues, notably how HIV affects Native communities, the medical production company Buffalo Nickel Creative, which is based in Oklahoma and Los Angeles, created a short documentary video titled Positively Native (you can view it at the top of this article or on YouTube).

The video, created for NNHAAD, features Bill Hall, a Tlingit tribal member; Shana Cozad, from the Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma; and Hamen Ides, a Lummi Tribal Member.

To better meet the challenges, the national Ending the HIV Epidemic initiative aims to get resources to the communities that need them most and in ways that are culturally appropriate.

Launched in 2019 by President Donald Trump, the plan aims to lower new HIV rates by 75% by 2025 and by 90% by 2030. This would amount to 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 pre-exposure prophylaxis 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.

To learn more about the Ending the HIV Epidemic initiative, read an overview at HIV.gov and visit the official web page at HRSA.org. For a related POZ article, see “Plans to End the HIV Epidemic at Home and Abroad.”

Similarly, the recently updated National HIV/AIDS Strategy aims to reduce new HIV infections by 75% by 2025 and by 90% by 2030 but lays out different objectives and strategies for reaching those targets. To learn more, see “What’s New in the Updated National HIV/AIDS Strategy?”

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