ELEVATE Will Train People Living With HIV for Jobs Ending the Epidemic

A similar training program, ESCALATE, will teach communities to recognize and fight HIV stigma.

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NMAC, a national advocacy group that fights HIV through the lens of race, is launching two training programs that support the federal initiative “Ending the HIV Epidemic: A Plan for America.” One program, ELEVATE, prepares people living with HIV for jobs related to fighting the epidemic. The other, ESCALATE, trains communities to recognize and end HIV stigma, with a focus on transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals, men who have sex with men, and the African-American community.

ELEVATE (Engage Leadership through Employment, Validation and Advancing Transformation & Equity) is a four-year national program with funding and support from the federal Health Resources and Service Administration (HRSA), an agency within the Department of Health and Human Services. According to an NMAC press release about ELEVATE, the program’s goal is to train people living with HIV to take advocacy and leadership roles in the nationwide effort to end the epidemic.

ESCALATE (Ending Stigma through Collaboration And Lifting All To Empowerment) aims to tackle stigma at the individual, organizational and systemic levels. It is also supported by HRSA.

“Stigma remains a major obstacle to HIV prevention, treatment and care,” said NMAC executive director Paul Kawata in a press release about ESCALATE. “Any plans to end the HIV epidemic, whether national or local, must address that stigma in order to be successful. Using our deep experience in training community leaders, NMAC will use the ESCALATE program to educate communities how to be able to see stigma when it happens and provide tools to address it when it does. It’s a huge task but one that is absolutely necessary.”

“We cannot say it enough times that meaningful engagement of people living with HIV is mandatory if we truly are committed to ending the epidemic,” added Ace Robinson, director of NMAC’s Center to End the Epidemics. “The vast majority of people living with HIV are racial/ethnic minorities who face a myriad of systemic societal ills in addition to HIV-related stigma. We must uplift these individuals by centering them on creating and implementing solutions. ELEVATE will help us all reach our common goal of ending the HIV epidemic.”

Both programs dovetail with the national plan to end HIV, which President Trump launched last year. The 10-year 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 to reach this goal involves investing federal funding and resources in 57 key jurisdictions. This translates to the 48 counties plus Washington, DC, and San Juan, Puerto Rico, that together account for 50% of new HIV cases, plus seven rural states with a high HIV burden.

Both ELEVATE and ESCALATE will concentrate training efforts in the 57 regions.

NMAC will operate ELEVATE in partnership with JSI Research & Training Institute Inc., the Association of Nurses in AIDS Care and the Latino Commission on AIDS. And NMAC will operate ESCALATE in partnership with Abt Associates, TRX Development and the nonpartisan and objective research organization NORC at the University of Chicago.

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

In related news, Kawata publishes a POZ blog. His latest post is titled “Jobs are Racial Justice.” You can read a collection of his posts here.

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