Federal and State Funding Cuts Increase HIV Risk in Dallas County

Mass layoffs and slashed funding threaten progress made toward eliminating HIV and AIDS in Dallas County and other major Texas towns.

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HIV organizations and community groups in Dallas say federal and state funding cuts threaten progress toward preventing and treating HIV and AIDS, KERA News reports. Funding cuts may also lead to financial crisis, a new study shows.

Since the start of the AIDS epidemic in the mid-1980s, Dallas has made great strides in preventing and treating new HIV cases. Maintaining or lowering HIV rates requires consistent testing, lifelong medications and regular follow-up visits.

Local organizations such as CAN Community Health and Prism Health North Texas have long prioritized access to care including HIV testing, treatment, prevention and counseling. These are vital services because people with HIV who achieve and maintain viral suppression experience slower disease progression, enjoy better overall health are less likely to develop opportunistic illnesses. What's more, people with an undetectable viral load don't transmit HIV to others through sex. This is known as treatment as prevention, or Undetectable Equals Untransmittable (U=U).

As the Trump administration continues to make cuts, many people in Dallas County and other major Texas counties are being denied access to HIV care, which endangers their health and risks increasing rates of transmission, especially among Latinos and Black communities.

In May, Dallas County was told it was prohibited from allocating money to local departments and organizations. Just months later in July, after planning the budget for the following year, local governments discovered that they would receive funding for HIV and AIDS case management, but it was too late.

By then, 25 Dallas County Health and Human Services staff have been laid off, including disease

data trackers, reports KERA News. Prism Health furloughed staff as well, added to Prism Health North Texas CEO John Carlo, MD, a former medical director of Dallas County Health and Human Services.

In 2022, about 21,065 people were living with HIV in Dallas County, according to AIDSVu data based on federal numbers. That same year, 910 people were newly diagnosed with HIV in the county.

What's more, four major North Texas counties made the state's top 10 list of new HIV diagnoses in 2023. Collin, Dallas, Denton and Tarrant counties recorded almost 34,000 known new HIV diagnoses collectively that year, according to the Texas Department of Health and Human Services.

In related news, a study highlights the financial repercussions from public health care cuts.

"One new case is estimated to cost like $420,000 in lifetime health care costs. So you prevent that one case — that one — and you've saved the community and the health care system a huge amount of money," said Phillip Huang, MD, MPH, Dallas County's Health and Human Services director.

"For the number of new cases we had in 2022, it's like $382 million in Dallas County that those new cases are anticipated to cost in future health care costs," Huang said. "These numbers are a wake-up call. Prevention and early treatment aren't just good medicine — they're smart economics."

Huang emphasizes that cuts to Medicaid and other health providers will only increase financial burdens and limit access to health care. These cuts could result in millions of deaths, including children, he said.

To learn more, click #Dallas or #Federal Funding. There, you'll see headlines such as "Deep Staff Cuts at a Little-Known Federal Agency Pose Trouble for Droves of Local Health Programs," "Medicaid Cuts Could Mean Hundreds of Thousands of Job Losses Annually" and "States Scramble to Shield Hospitals From GOP Medicaid Cuts."

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