



## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **AIDS Drug Assistance Program waiting lists highlighted at Congressional briefing *Congresswoman urges immediate action***

Washington, D.C. (December 7, 2009) – On Thursday December 3, 2009 the Community Access National Network (CANN) in collaboration with the Congressional Black Caucus held a briefing on Capitol Hill to discuss the growing waiting lists for the AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP). Currently 9 states have been forced to deny otherwise eligible HIV patients their life-saving medications because of funding shortfalls and state budget cuts. A significant contributing factor to these budget cuts has been irregular funding from Congress for the Ryan White CARE Act which administers ADAP. When coupled with the current economic crises, these funding issues bubble to the surface and cause significant obstacles in accessing care.

Holly Hanson, Director of the Ryan White Part B program in Iowa, a state which currently has 16 individuals on a waiting list spoke about the challenges of providing life-saving medications in a state with a low HIV incidence. “The funding for ADAP has not kept pace with the growth of the problem and since Ryan White is not an entitlement program like Medicare, when the funding runs out, the funding runs out,” Ms. Hanson emphasized during the briefing.

“When I left Lexington yesterday,” commented Mary Edinger, a coordinator for Ryan White in Kentucky who does case work for patients on the list, “we had 123 people on our list - this morning it is up to 125. Not one person has been taken off the list and restarted their treatment since June.”

Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, fresh off the House floor, urged her colleagues in the Congress to cosponsor a piece of legislation that will free up significant funds in ADAP. Currently, tens of millions of dollars are locked up in Medicare Part D but H.R. 2777 would make this money available. “We must work to fix this great disservice to

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people suffering with HIV/AIDS,” the Congresswoman remarked, “allow Part D to apply ADAP funds to ‘true out of pocket’ cost.”

Bryan Jackson, a “CANN Goodwill Ambassador”, has been living with HIV his whole life. Due to the success of his medication, the virus is undetectable in his body. Bryan is a testament to the power and importance of taking the right cocktail and adhering to the regimen tightly. For the patients who are being placed on wait lists, every day is an opportunity for the virus to mutate and grow. “Is the Congress going to be a part of the solution and fully fund ADAP, or is it going to do nothing and be a part of the problem,” Bryan asked at the briefing.

“In 2003, Congress appropriated 72% of the federal ADAP budget – a number that has fallen to 51% in 2008 and continues to fall,” stated Laura Hanen, Government Relations Director for the National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors, which works closely with the Ryan White and ADAP directors from all 50 states and the territories. She also reported on \$167 million in state budget cuts to AIDS programs over the past year and emphasized the need for Congress to increase appropriations for ADAP.

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