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PRESS RELEASE

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Waiting List for HIV/AIDS Individuals Hits All Time HIGH

Congress and the Administration Yet to Take Action for 2,090 Patients

Ohio and New Jersey dropping access for 1,200 in coming days

Florida adding almost 20 individuals a day

WASHINGTON, D.C. – A waiting list for low-income HIV/AIDS patients enrolled in a safety-net program continues to grow at an exponential rate as Congress and the Administration fail to find additional funding. In the past 2 weeks alone, more than 400 additional individuals with HIV/AIDS have been made to wait for medication that can sustain their lives.

The AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP) currently administers life-saving drugs to approximately 125,000 patients with HIV/AIDS around the nation. The program has seen record growth due to the rapid clip of new HIV infections, roughly 56,000 per year according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. When coupled with more aggressive testing programs and linkages to care, ADAP experienced a 14% increase in patient utilization over the past year. But state budget cuts have left many patients in limbo, waiting for their medications.

Additionally, despite a significant drop in the contribution from state budgets to ADAP, the federal government’s share of the budget has remained largely flat, shrinking from about 70% of all ADAP expenditures just a few years ago to today’s less than 50%. The most recent federal budget allocation was an increase of a mere half a percent. When compared with the 14% patient increase, it is not difficult to understand why the waiting list continues to grow exponentially.

“If the Congress and the Administration cannot find additional money to fix ADAP, this crisis will certainly spread to many more states,” commented Congressman Maurice Hinchey, who sits on the Congressional House Appropriations Committee. “States with larger HIV/AIDS populations such as New York will certainly feel the pain as we are already using money set aside for next year’s ADAP budget to fill the gap left by the federal government this year.”

Eighty members of Congress, including Representatives Hinchey and Donna Christensen, Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus Health Braintrust, sent a letter to the President earlier this year imploring him to find an additional \$126 million to ensure all patients enrolled in ADAP have access to treatment. “These funds will allow the system to close most of the gaps in the states

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that currently have wait lists and prevent the states which will need to implement these lists from doing so in the coming months,” explained Congresswoman Christensen. “The longer we wait to provide this funding, the greater this racial and ethnic, as well as geographic health disparity will continue to spiral out of control. With almost half of these patients making less per year than the drugs themselves cost and two-thirds of those in ADAP as racial and ethnic minorities, it is our duty to take immediate action.”

Senator Richard Burr of North Carolina, whose waiting list is the largest in the country, introduced a bill which would make up the shortfall from unused stimulus funds. “Patients waiting to enroll in ADAP in North Carolina and around our nation are in need of leadership here in Washington,” said Senator Burr. “Congress and the Obama Administration must move quickly to eliminate ADAP waiting lists and undue formulary restrictions. We must keep our promise to these patients in need.”

While Senate Democrats oppose the idea of using funding from the stimulus, they have yet to offer an alternative bill solving the growing shortfall.

William Arnold, Executive Director of CANN, has been working with the HIV/AIDS community on accessing life-saving treatment for over two decades. “Clearly there is interest in fixing ADAP,” Mr. Arnold remarked about the crisis. “The Senate and the House have both offered ideas to find the funding. Governors and state legislators are cutting other programs to make their state ADAP solvent. The HIV/AIDS community has held rallies, call in days, educational forums, and have repeatedly petitioned the White House to step in. The President’s own AIDS advisory Council (PACHA) agreed unanimously to a resolution supporting the needed \$126 million immediate need for ADAP. With more people on a waiting list than ever before, the time for action is right now.”