



**HARM REDUCTION
COALITION**

Letter to Congress to Lift the Federal Ban on Needle Exchange

National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day

February 7, 2008

National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day serves as a watershed moment to call upon Congress to take greater responsibility and stronger actions in stemming the ever-increasing epidemic of HIV/AIDS in the African American community. On behalf of the following organizations, we urge Congress to remove the federal ban on needle exchange, and thereby allow the use of federal funds for a proven method for curbing the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Joining the Harm Reduction Coalition as the initial signers to this letter are, **the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the National Urban League, the National Minority AIDS Council, and the National African American Drug Policy Coalition**

Since 1989, Congress has allowed the annual enacting of this ban that prohibits states and local jurisdictions from utilizing any federal dollars for needle exchange programs.

According to data from the National Institutes on Drug Abuse, injection drug use accounts for more than one-third (36 percent) of the estimated 40,000 annual new cases of AIDS in the United States. In the African American community the impact of the federal ban is mind-numbing as up to 42 percent of males and 51 percent of females infected with AIDS is due to the proliferation of shared needles among infected injection drug users. Rigorous scientific research has proven clearly that improved access to sterile syringes through needle exchange programs reduces the transmission of HIV and Hepatitis C, without increasing drug use.

Needle exchange is widely accepted as part of the AIDS prevention landscape. Yet, the Ban on federal funding results in too few programs, too few hours and too few services, creating a dependence on limited private philanthropy. This political obstacle severely constrains one of the most effective strategies for preventing HIV transmission in adults.

While none of the groups signed on below support or endorse the use of illegal drugs, needle exchange programs are a proven and effective means of stemming the spread of HIV and other blood-borne illnesses.

Furthermore, it has been shown through accepted scientific research that needle exchange programs do not increase or encourage drug use.

Needle Exchange may be the first opportunity for some people to be exposed to any type of health care intervention and provides an avenue of education for risk reduction. It also increases the opportunity to engage individuals in preparation for drug treatment as they reduce their harm related to drugs and paraphernalia use.

Syringe exchange programs not only decrease transmission of HIV, hepatitis, and other blood borne illnesses, but also increase safe injecting practices, entrance into drug treatment programs, and safe disposal of used syringes.

Removing the needle exchange federal funding ban is a first step in advancing a national AIDS policy that places saving lives above politics. It provides much-needed resources and access to services for a key at-risk population, and reduces their likelihood of contracting and spreading HIV.

This sign-on letter represents an affirmation of commitment and faith in the idea that reducing the spread of AIDS in the African American community represents a true priority in our national government. And that in 2008 Congress will muster the political will necessary to embrace all prevention methods that save lives and finally remove the federal ban on needle exchange.

Sincerely,

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

National Urban League

National Minority AIDS Council

National African American Drug Policy Coalition

Harm Reduction Coalition

AIDS Action, DC

AIDS Foundation of Chicago, IL

AIDS Project Los Angeles, CA

Association of Nurses in AIDS Care, OH

Black Leadership Council on HIV, WA

Cascade AIDS Project, OR

Center for the Study of Hepatitis C, Cornell University, NY

Chicago Recovery Alliance

Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition, CO

Community HIV/AIDS Mobilization Project (CHAMP), NY & RI

Connecticut AIDS Resource Coalition, CT

Drug Reform Coordination Network, CA

Gay Men's Health Crisis, NY

Harm Reduction Project, UT

Health GAP, NY

Hep C Connection, CO

Housing Works, Inc., DC

Human Rights Watch, NY

Mendocino County AIDS Volunteer Network, CA

Michigan Positive Action Coalition (MI-POZ)

National Advocates for Pregnant Women

National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors, DC

National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO), DC

New York Harm Reduction Educators

North American Syringe Exchange Network

NYC AIDS Housing Network (NYCAHN)

Paterson Counseling Center, Inc., NJ

Positive Health Project, NY

PreventionWorks!, DC

Project Inform, CA

St. Ann's Corner of Harm Reduction, NY

The AIDS Institute, DC

The AIDS LIFE Campaign, CT

Title II Community AIDS National Network, DC

Topeka AIDS Project, KS

Treatment Action Group, NY

VOCAL (Voices of Community Advocates and Leaders), NY

Washington Heights CORNER Project, NY