

July 15, 2009

The Honorable David Obey
Chairman
House Appropriations Committee
U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jerry Lewis
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Obey and Ranking Member Lewis:

As national organizations dedicated to improved public health outcomes for all Americans, we are very concerned that HIV/AIDS continues to be a serious health challenge in our country. It is imperative that effective, evidence-based HIV prevention approaches be implemented without delay. To that end, we are writing to support the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor-HHS's decision to remove the ban on use of federal funds for needle exchange programs and to urge the full Appropriations Committee to pass the FY 2010 Labor-HHS Appropriations bill without any additional restrictions on the use of these funds.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), injection drug users (IDUs) account for 16% of all new HIV infections in the United States. A variety of interventions are needed to reduce HIV incidence among IDUs and their partners, including HIV prevention education and access to drug treatment. But since 1988, public health agencies have been restricted by law from using federal funds for one evidence-based approach: needle exchange programs

Numerous scientific studies, including several studies funded by the federal government, have established that needle exchange programs, when implemented as part of a comprehensive HIV/AIDS prevention strategy, are an effective HIV prevention intervention and do not promote drug use. This position is confirmed by leading scientific experts including three former Surgeons General. Needle exchange programs have also been shown to prevent the transmission of hepatitis C, another growing threat to the nation's health.

President Obama has committed to developing a National AIDS Strategy with a primary objective of reducing HIV incidence. Accomplishing this laudable goal will require implementation of all available proven effective HIV prevention programs, including needle exchange programs.

Finally, we wish to emphasize that removing this restriction will in no way require states or localities to implement needle exchange programs; it will simply permit them to use federal HIV prevention funds for this purpose should they so choose, within the context of a broader HIV prevention effort. In those jurisdictions that already have needle exchange programs, local ordinances have determined how these programs should be managed, including deciding issues of location. The federal government should not override local authorities with restrictions made from afar on how these programs should be implemented.

We therefore support revocation of the federal ban on federal funding for needle exchange programs in order to allow interested states and localities the financial flexibility to implement evidence-based HIV prevention initiatives.

Sincerely,

1. AIDS Action Council
2. Access Community Health Network (ACCESS)
3. American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine
4. American Academy of HIV Medicine
5. American Academy of Pediatrics
6. American Medical Association
7. American Nurses Association
8. American Psychiatric Association
9. American Public Health Association
10. American Social Health Association
11. amfAR, The Foundation for AIDS Research
12. Association of Nurses in AIDS Care
13. Association of Ohio Health Commissioners
14. Association of Schools of Public Health
15. CityMatCH
16. HIV Medicine Association
17. Infectious Diseases Society of America
18. Legal Action Center
19. National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors
20. National Association of County and City Health Officers
21. National Association of People with AIDS
22. National Minority AIDS Council
23. New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
24. Partnership for Prevention
25. Public Health Foundation
26. The Praxis Project

27. Trust for America's Health

Please direct all inquiries or comments to Jeff Levi of Trust for America's Health (jlevi@tfah.org), 202-223-9877 and Chris Collins of amfAR, The Foundation for AIDS Research (chris.collins@amfar.org) 202-331-8600.