

Center for Global Health Policy

Promoting Evidence-based US Action on Global HIV and Tuberculosis

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HIV/AIDS Experts Call For Bold Treatment and Prevention Targets to Combat Global AIDS

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WASHINGTON—As World AIDS Day approaches, leading physician-scientists called on the White House and Congress to continue the scale-up of HIV prevention and treatment services in the developing world and preserve U.S. leadership in the battle against this deadly epidemic.

With the Obama Administration expected to release its five-year global AIDS strategy on Dec. 1—World AIDS Day—HIV/AIDS doctors and researchers said the new plan should set bold new treatment targets for PEPFAR, the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, and include robust funding levels to fulfill promises made in the landmark Lantos-Hyde legislation, which calls for spending \$48 billion over five years on global AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.

“Less than a decade ago, some questioned the viability of providing HIV treatment to poor patients in the developing world. Today, we have extraordinary evidence of PEPFAR’s success -more than 2 million people in resource-poor countries have avoided severe diseases and untimely deaths through access to antiretroviral drugs,” said Kenneth Mayer, MD, co-chair of Global Center’s scientific advisory committee and a professor at Brown University, where he directs the AIDS Program. “But the majority of people who need lifesaving antiretroviral therapy still do not have access to it. Without continued scale up of HIV treatment, millions of people in the developing world are likely to succumb to this chronic, treatable disease—with devastating consequences for their families and their communities.”

HIV/AIDS is the No. 1 cause of death of women of reproductive age, and it remains a leading cause of maternal mortality in sub-Saharan Africa. Twelve million children have lost one or both parents to AIDS and the numbers of orphans continues to rise. One recent scientific analysis concluded that only a linear expansion in PEPFAR’s antiretroviral treatment capacity would result in 1.2 million avoidable deaths in the next 5 years in South Africa alone. Already, in countries like Uganda and elsewhere, reports indicate

that clinics are turning away new HIV patients or only putting them on treatment when a current patient dies.

PEPFAR and other global AIDS initiatives have begun to change the trajectory of the epidemic, leading to declines in AIDS-related deaths and in HIV incidence. Continued robust scale up of HIV services is vital to preserving and building on these fragile gains.

“The availability of HIV treatment is essential to encouraging HIV testing, since knowledge of HIV status is a backbone of prevention efforts,” said Dr. Mayer. “The imperative to expand access to HIV treatment is magnified by recent scientific data demonstrating that earlier treatment prevents long-term consequences of HIV disease and makes HIV-positive people less infectiousness, thereby lessening the likelihood of HIV transmission.”

Scientific evidence has also shown that expanded HIV treatment has a wide range of other health benefits, from improvements in maternal and child health to decreases in deaths from diseases like tuberculosis. Aggressive new treatment and prevention targets and robust funding will give the U.S. leverage with allies from other wealthy nations to follow suit and to challenge the leaders of developing nations to increase their own spending on health programs to improve the lives of their own people.

For more information or to schedule an interview with an expert on this issue, contact Deirdre Shesgreen at **703-740-4954** or dshesgreen@idsociety.org.

The Center for Global Health Policy is an organization of physicians and scientists dedicated to promoting the effective use of U.S. funding for addressing the global HIV/AIDS and TB epidemics by providing scientific and policy information to policymakers, federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, and the media. The Center, a project of the Infectious Diseases Society of America and its sister organization, the HIV Medicine Association (HIVMA), is based in Arlington, Va.