Global infectious disease clinicians, researchers call on President Obama to set new PEPFAR goals

As clinicians and researchers involved in global HIV and TB responses, we congratulate President Obama on the success of policies and investments that have in the last year raised the numbers of people receiving life-saving antiretroviral treatment through PEPFAR to more than seven and a half million, a four and a half fold increase since the start of his administration. PEPFAR has also accelerated its efforts to prevent the spread of HIV, providing support that has now made it possible for more than six and a half million men to receive medical circumcisions that will help protect them from acquiring HIV. In addition, PEPFAR support for HIV testing and counseling has made it possible for than 56.7 million people to know their HIV status, in the last year alone. More than 14 million pregnant women were among those to receive HIV counseling and testing in the last year thanks to PEPFAR, and in the last two years, more than 1.5 million pregnant women living with HIV received services to protect their health and prevent their children from being born with the virus that leads to AIDS. These accomplishments, announced on World AIDS Day, reflect the realization of ambitious goals set by President Obama in order to make the most of advances in treatment and biomedical prevention measures.

We also applaud the opened access to data on PEPFAR investments in the last year, that show how these goals were reached, and shed light on areas of unmet need. The goals that have been set and reached, and the knowledge we have gained make it possible to build on PEPFAR’s successes, and plan interventions to reach the many marginalized people, including men who have sex with men, individuals involved in sex work, and people who inject drugs, who have yet to benefit from the world’s most successful health and humanitarian initiative.

For these reasons, we were disappointed that President Obama did not take the opportunity the announcement of PEPFAR’s achievements provided to establish new treatment and prevention goals for PEPFAR in the coming year and to specify clear outcomes from those targets. We welcomed the announcement of important new initiatives to respond to the alarming infection rates among women and girls and a renewed focus on developing and training cadres of health care workers capable of meeting the HIV prevention and treatment needs of African nations. But as we have seen, aiming for specific targets plays a critical role in ensuring the prudent use of resources, in identifying resource gaps, and in achieving meaningful outcomes. We have also seen that in the absence of a cure or vaccine, our greatest hope to control HIV and bring an end to the global threat that it poses lies in increasing our investment in treatment and bio-behavioral prevention measures that we now know not only save lives but can turn the trajectory of the epidemic. Bold targets for PEPFAR, which has from its inception enjoyed bipartisan support, are also crucial tools for policymakers as they allocate annual funding for this lifesaving program. With more at stake than ever before, we call on President Obama to set the course for PEPFAR’s next accomplishments by establishing new goals and related outcomes for numbers of people to be reached with prevention and treatment interventions, and to announce these goals before the release of his next fiscal budget.
The Center for Global Health Policy, established by the Infectious Diseases Society of America’s Education & Research Foundation in 2008, supports and promotes U.S. efforts to combat HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis around the world. The Center provides scientific and policy information to U.S. policymakers, federal agencies, nongovernmental organizations and the news media, linking decision-makers to the latest evidence-based input and guidance from physician/scientists and other professionals from both developing and developed countries. For more information visit www.idsaglobalhealth.org.