

ACT UP PHILADELPHIA
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Contacts:

Max Ray 215-908-8939 English

Jose de Marco: 267 549 6495 Spanish Media

**ACT UP Philadelphia Calls President Obama's National HIV/AIDS Strategy
"Tentative and Vague," and Calls For Specific Funding Targets**

Philadelphia -- ACT UP Philadelphia members expressed disappointment upon reading the much-anticipated National HIV/AIDS Strategy released on Monday.

"It reads like they sat down and decided how much they could spend, and then decided their strategy based on that. Imagine if that's how we developed our war strategies." said ACT UP member Max Ray.

Ray pointed out the many passages in the report which stressed limited resources, and strategized on how best to allocate them. Jose deMarco of ACT UP and Proyecto Sol Filadelfia agreed. "They pointed out how effective it is for injection drug users to have access to clean needles, but they didn't say a word about actually providing federal funding for syringe exchanges, which is desperately needed."

Last year's appropriation bill marked the first time that federal money could be used for syringe exchange programs, but no funding has been allocated specifically for such programs.

ACT UP and Proyecto SOL members agreed that there were positive aspects of the report, such as the emphasis on a broad spectrum of evidence-based prevention efforts, the focus on reducing disparities such as the disproportionate infection rates among people of color, gay men, and women, and the emphasis on providing supports like housing to help people manage their illness while coping with other factors like poverty, mental health issues, or drug and alcohol addiction.

However, Ray found even those emphases to be, "too little too late. It's nice that they're not going to be actively obstructionist, tying people's hands on issues like syringe exchange or access to condoms, but what we really need is for them to put money where there mouth is."

Philadelphia currently has a single syringe exchange program to serve the entire city, a 173 person waiting list for AIDS housing, and nearly two million dollars cut from its HIV prevention budget. deMarco noted that, "the big challenges we're facing are because at every level of government, the politicians don't have the will to fix the problems.

Our biggest problems are with funding, and this strategy makes only tentative requests for more funding. There's nothing specific about how they're going to improve access to housing, clean needles, prevention education, or any of the things people with HIV/AIDS need.",.

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Jose de Marco
166 W. Lehigh Ave
Lower level
Philadelphia, PA 19133
josemarcos9@yahoo.com
267 549 6495C
215 634 5272
[proyecto sol.org](http://proyecto.sol.org)

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