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MEDIA CONTACT

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Maude Carroll, (312) 334-0913

Obama Administration Unveils First-Ever National Plan to Fight Domestic HIV Epidemic
National HIV/AIDS Strategy will target most vulnerable populations

WASHINGTON, DC - After three years of rigorous grassroots advocacy, the Obama Administration will release the country's first National HIV/AIDS Strategy today. The unprecedented plan sets forth an ambitious agenda to effectively address the domestic U.S. HIV epidemic.

This afternoon, administration officials will brief the public on the main features of the Strategy and will hold a reception to honor representatives from more than 200 HIV/AIDS organizations from around the country.

"This day marks the culmination of years of hard work and commitment from the HIV/AIDS community," said AIDS Foundation of Chicago (AFC) President and CEO Mark Ishaug. "We thank the President and his staff for delivering on their promise of developing a National HIV/AIDS Strategy and for doing so in a manner that is inclusive of so many diverse voices. Now we must transform the document's inspiring vision into reality – and that will be no small task."

The primary goals of the Strategy include: **reducing new HIV infections; improving access to care and the health outcomes of people living with HIV; and reducing HIV-related health disparities.** The Strategy also acknowledges the central importance of better coordination across government agencies in order to foster a more effective response to the epidemic. The Strategy aims government efforts on following the evidence of what works to address the epidemic among the populations and areas where it is most acute. The plan firmly asserts the need for domestic efforts to increase outreach and engagement of gay men of all races/ethnicities and within the African American community, groups that bear the brunt of the HIV/AIDS crisis.

AFC has been at the center of the movement for a National HIV/AIDS Strategy since its inception. In 2007, AFC joined with AIDS Action Committee of Massachusetts, AIDS Action Council, Black AIDS Institute, Balm in Gilead, Community HIV/AIDS Mobilization Project (CHAMP), Gay Men's Health Crisis, and the San Francisco AIDS Foundation to form the Coalition for a National AIDS Strategy. The group coalesced around a single idea: the United States should have a singular, outcomes-oriented plan of action to fight the domestic HIV/AIDS epidemic. In the subsequent three years, what started as an ember of an idea, one that many thought was unattainable, has grown into an active grassroots movement inspiring thousands of organizations, individuals, policymakers, and the President himself.

“It has been both a personal and professional privilege to participate in this journey,” said AFC Vice President David Ernesto Munar, who has led AFC’s advocacy around the National HIV/AIDS Strategy. “Today’s release of the Strategy is an important milestone that we should all celebrate. However, it’s critical to acknowledge this is just the beginning. Advocates must stay engaged in the weeks, months, and years ahead to ensure this plan gets fully implemented.”

And indeed, the high-note hit by today’s release stands in stark contrast to other recent developments in the HIV/AIDS community. The ongoing crisis in AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP) funding has once again brought to the forefront the disparity and injustice inherent in today’s domestic HIV epidemic.

“There are already opportunities to use the Strategy to hold the federal government accountable. The ADAP crisis and implementation of recently passed health care reform legislation are prime examples of places we can use the administration’s own Strategy to push all levels of government towards aggressive action against HIV/AIDS,” said Munar. “We need to continue to fight for the strongest support possible for these programs and to advocate for the most vulnerable and at-risk populations.”

AFC has been working closely with the HIV Prevention Justice Alliance, a network of organizations advocating for effective and just HIV prevention policies, and will be live blogging the events of the day. Follow the live blog on the Alliance’s website: <http://preventionjustice.org>.

The press conference where the Strategy will be officially released will take place at 2:00 p.m. EST followed by the reception to honor HIV/AIDS advocates taking place at 6:00 p.m. EST.

Later this month, Munar will be presenting lessons learned from the National HIV/AIDS Strategy development process and will participate on a panel on the Strategy at the 2010 International AIDS Conference in Vienna.

Founded in 1985 by community activists and physicians, the AIDS Foundation of Chicago is a catalyst for local, national, and international action against HIV/AIDS.

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