



PRESS RELEASE

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Statement by James Wagoner on the release of the National HIV/AIDS Strategy

Working with youth and eliminating health disparities are key to the fight against HIV and AIDS

“For the first time in nearly a decade, HIV/AIDS policy is truly being driven by science and public health, rather than by ideology. If the Obama administration’s new National HIV/AIDS Strategy is accompanied by an equal commitment of resources and political will, the United States has the opportunity to begin eliminating health disparities and to build a generational firewall against this epidemic.

The National HIV Strategy shines a spotlight on the central fact of the current epidemic-- that HIV disproportionately impacts those most affected by poverty, racism, homophobia and health care disparities. While public health experts have worked to address the reality of health disparities for some time, the NHAS brings a long overdue shift in the political framework that underpins our country’s response to HIV and AIDS. In addition to current prevention and treatment efforts, we also have a responsibility to address the socioeconomic, cultural, and demographic factors that contribute to the epidemic.

Education, prevention, and treatment will always be necessary. But, without addressing the systemic and systematic causes that underlie the dramatically disparate rates of HIV and AIDS in America, these interventions will never be sufficient.

One out of every four people diagnosed with HIV is between ages 13 and 29. America must commit to providing truly comprehensive sex education – including information about abstinence,

contraception, sexual health, decision making, and healthy relationships – as well as access to prevention methods, HIV screening, and health services.

We must start sooner and do more. Young people should be engaged as partners throughout the implementation of the National HIV/AIDS Strategy, with a particular focus on those youth most at risk of infection and those already living with HIV and AIDS. As such, the NHAS should support the creation, evaluation, and implementation of programs and services that specifically address the needs young women of color and young men who have sex with men, especially young men of color who have sex with men. Most importantly, these strategies must begin long before young people are likely to become sexually active; anything else will continue to be too little, too late.

If we are truly committed to changing the tide of HIV/AIDS in the U.S., young people offer our best opportunity for success. America must not cede another generation to this epidemic.”

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