



Media Contact: Kali Lindsey
Sr. Director for Federal Policy
KLindsey@harlemunited.org
Direct: (212) 801-2455
Cell: (646) 413-8035

Harlem United Applauds President Obama's Release of Nation's First National HIV/AIDS Strategy

New York, N.Y. – July 13, 2010 – Today, President Obama released the nation's first National HIV/AIDS Strategy (NHAS). This action reinvigorates national efforts around three widely shared objectives: reducing new HIV infections, increasing access to health care, and reducing HIV-related health disparities.

Without any new money available for the NHAS, the challenge for decision-makers will be to deepen our public health response with existing resources through the objectives set forth in the NHAS. Community advocates and others concerned also hope that the NHAS will foster greater collaboration to better optimize existing resources and efforts among federal agencies in the administration of U.S. HIV/AIDS programs.

All lives are created equal. The strategy will promote redirection of existing resources toward communities and jurisdictions experiencing the greatest burden of disease. These monies should be used for proven effective structural and biomedical interventions that can be brought to scale. At the same time, resources must continue to be available to sustain successes in less burdened communities. Harlem United President and CEO, Patrick McGovern has often stated, "We are at a watershed moment in the history of the AIDS epidemic. The current opportunity for disease eradication calls for routine testing and universal access to treatment as the organizing principle driving HIV policy and resource allocation."

Though there is no disagreement that earlier diagnosis is a primary goal, efforts to expand routine HIV screening have not yet been fully implemented, even in high HIV prevalence settings. This remains the case even after the CDC updated their HIV testing recommendations in 2006. Those recommendations urge universal opt-out routine HIV screening in clinical settings for all people ages 13 – 64 regardless of risk. More than 56,300 individuals are infected with HIV each year, almost half will progress to an AIDS diagnosis within a year, and 5% of them will die within a month.

Universal access to treatment will in many ways be afforded when state Medicaid programs are expanded in 2014. This action is prompted by the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (H.R. 3590) signed into law by President Obama in March of this year. However, currently there are more than 2,200 people currently on waiting lists to

receive their life-saving medications from their underfunded AIDS Drug Assistance Program. “We will never win our battle against HIV until we are able to test those who have been at-risk, get those who are HIV-positive into appropriate care, and ensure them access to treatment and supportive services to help them succeed,” stated Kali Lindsey.

As many prepare for implementation of the NHAS, Mr. McGovern cautions, “Adopting routine testing and universal access to treatment as the organizing principle does not mean neglecting other critical issues. It does mean seizing the opportunity to halt HIV transmission today while pursuing longer term solutions for tomorrow.”

Harlem United, founded in 1988, provides a full range of medical, social, and supportive services to predominantly African-American and Latino individuals living with HIV/AIDS, whose diagnoses are often complicated by addiction, mental illness, and homelessness.

###