

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Michigan Positive Action Coalition (MI-POZ) applauds first ever National AIDS Strategy and urges funding for immediate implementation

The White House Office of National AIDS Policy (ONAP) released the United States' first-ever National HIV/AIDS Strategy (NHAS) and companion implementation plan since the beginning of the epidemic in 1981. Themes of NHAS are reducing the incidence of new HIV infections; improving health outcomes and access to care for people living with HIV; and addressing the striking HIV-related disparities affecting African Americans, immigrants, Latinos and Native Americans. Furthermore, the NHAS prioritizes reducing the disproportionate impact of HIV on gay and bisexual men of all races.

The implementation plan also, rightly, acknowledges the need to re-engage the national leadership of the LGBT community. That leadership has been excluded from the table for nearly the past decade by faith based intervention models such as abstinence only driving the prevention efforts in the U.S. Matt Foreman, former executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, was correct in 2008 in Detroit at the Creating Change conference when he declared that the gay community needed to "own" the epidemic and the fact that in the U.S. it was predominately a "gay disease." We are hopeful that the Obama administration's calls for re-engagement will induce more aggressive, comprehensive action by national, state and local gay leadership

However, immediate funding MUST be made available to meet our national goals!

A prevention strategy based on test and treat with NO additional funding support for testing or treatment isn't a national strategy. It is a cruel statement to make in the face of growing numbers of cases and growing ADAP waiting lists.

We agree with the policy statements in the national strategy along with the implementation plan. They call for the same things Michigan HIV/AIDS advocates have called for with regard to prevention and care. We've worked tirelessly on ensuring HIV prevention programming in this state reach those most impacted and at risk, as well as being based on science and not ideology. In care, we have also continued our efforts in encouraging our state to maintain early entry into high quality and continued HIV care.

We see this national strategy paralleling our efforts on an even more salient point where it comes to addressing HIV stigma. The national strategy and its companion implementation plan document, crystallize the impact of stigma faced by those living with and at risk for HIV/AIDS. As we again in Michigan have advocated for more leadership opportunities from those living

with HIV/AIDS, the national strategy highlights the importance of this. It also supports what we have done in calling for HIV disclosure laws that are based on science and not fear. ***It asks as we have, to end the time when it is acceptable to criminalize people living with HIV.***

Our hope is that this national strategy will continue to encourage our public health leaders, advocates, activists and people living with HIV to meet the goals we've worked towards for so many years. Attaining these goals however, cannot happen without a clear, accepted and distinct role given to Michigan persons with HIV/AIDS in leadership. Too often policy decisions are made FOR us without the benefit of direct involvement in policy discussions. Too often we have seen a handful of recruited HIV positive people thrown into important policy processes simply because of their status and not given the capacity to truly engage and inform our processes. This ongoing paternalistic use of us must end. **We deserve more than the token portion given us in recent history.**

The time for HIV public health planning without us is over.

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The Michigan Positive Action Coalition (MI-POZ) is a volunteer advocacy organization seeking to impact sound policy regarding HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and research.

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