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Obama Administration Releases National HIV/AIDS Strategy

Recognizes Importance of Treating Co-Morbidities but More Priority Focus Needed to Specifically Address other Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

Today, the Obama Administration released the first-ever national strategy to coordinate federal efforts in addressing HIV/AIDS. The strategy is centered on three main goals: reducing HIV incidence, increasing access to care and optimizing health outcomes, and reducing HIV-related health disparities. With this plan, we as a nation are taking a critical step forward in creating a focused, coordinated and ambitious response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the National Coalition of STD Directors (NCSDDC) applauds the Administration's efforts, particularly those within the Office of National AIDS Policy.

While this is clearly progress, the linkage between HIV and other STDs is not fully explicated in the strategy. There is a strong, well-documented biological link between HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Persons with an STD have a two to five fold increased risk of acquiring HIV if exposed to the virus through sexual contact, and HIV-infected persons who are co-infected with another STD are more likely to transmit HIV through sexual contact than other HIV-infected persons.

"We are pleased that included in this strategy is a recognition of STDs as a main HIV-related co-morbidity, but the strategy fails to provide enough specifics to underscore that addressing STDs is really the frontline of addressing co-morbidities," stated William Smith, Executive Director of the National Coalition of STD Directors. Smith continued, "STDs and HIV/AIDS are a powerful syndemic that are far too often viewed as siloed issues. The burden of this syndemic has had a heavily disproportionate impact on gay and bisexual men, women and African Americans; populations that have been prioritized throughout the development of this strategy."

The importance of addressing co-morbid conditions such as STDs has been a strong theme emphasized by different stakeholders throughout the development of the strategy. This issue was consistently raised throughout the 14 community discussions held across the country intended to provide input to the strategy, and NCSDDC has continually weighed in with the Office of National HIV/AIDS Policy and the

President's Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS on the need for STD prevention and treatment to be a core element of this plan.

NCSA will remain engaged with the Administration and the broader HIV/AIDS community to ensure that the implementation of this strategy is a thorough and transparent process.

Peter Leone, NCSA Board Chair and Medical Director, HIV/STD Prevention and Care Branch of the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, noted "While the Strategy unfortunately does not provide any new resources to achieve the goals outlined, we hope that this plan will serve as a blueprint for Congressional Appropriators to set funding priorities. NCSA will continue to make the case that increased funds for STD prevention are absolutely essential in order to fully achieve the goals of the National HIV/AIDS Strategy."