

End the AIDS Epidemic in America

The AIDS epidemic in the United States rages on. Over the last 25 years over ½ million people have died and approximately 1.2 million Americans are living with HIV. It's estimated that 25% of those do not know their status and 25% are not currently in care and treatment. This is in part driving the rate of new infections which has been at 40,000/year for the last 10 years. If we are not making progress in stopping this disease in our own country; how can we hope to stop it in the rest of the world where an estimated 40 million people are infected?

There are drug treatments that can keep the virus in check, but over a patient's lifetime the total health care costs for that person alone will run over \$650,000. This is an extreme burden on a health care system already in crisis. There is no cure and no vaccine, but we know how the virus is transmitted and have the tools to stop it. The time has come to do so.

When the drugs were introduced in the late 1980's and death rates rapidly declined, intensity about the epidemic dissipated. Many across our country believe the crisis is over and that AIDS is no longer a threat. In recent years the epidemic has not been a domestic public policy priority.

As a result, public funding at both the federal and local level has been reduced and private donations by individuals and foundations in the U.S. are down significantly. This at the same time that over 600,000 people in this county are not in care and the rate of new infections remains constant. The focus has turned to the global challenge, while we still have a crisis in America. Some communities in the U.S. have higher new infection rates than communities in Africa.

The real challenge: how do we reengage Americans in the battle here at home? Clearly our messages have become stale and we are not reaching the appropriate audiences nor motivating them to get involved. We need to create "buzz" around HIV/AIDS once again; we need to develop the political will to **"End the Epidemic in America"**.

AIDS Action and WRGH is pulling together a group of national opinion leaders and communication experts to help define a new approach and strategy to reinvigorate the debate. We are including leaders from business, academia, the media, foundations, and other organizations to "brainstorm"

with us. The objective is to end the session with the outline of a plan that can guide HIV/AIDS leaders forward toward a comprehensive communication and political strategy **“To End the Epidemic in America”**. We need participants to provide their expertise and knowledge about similar challenges in their fields to the issue at hand. No prior knowledge or experience with HIV is necessary. We are looking for out of the box ideas, and concepts and methodologies that have been successful on other issues.

The meeting will take place in New York City on Monday, July 16th and Tuesday, July 17th.