

**CHICAGO**

**DEFENDER**

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**ACTIVISTS WANT  
MORE CITY FUNDS  
TO FIGHT AIDS IN  
BLACK COMMUNITY  
BARE?**



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## Activists request additional \$1.7 million for HIV/AIDS prevention in 2007 budget

by Mema Ayi  
Defender Staff Writer

Over time, an additional \$1.7 million in HIV/AIDS prevention funding will save the city millions in public health funding, AIDS activists said at a budget hearing Wednesday.

The city has funded prevention programs at the same levels since 2003, but factoring inflation rates and an estimated 52 percent increase in HIV/AIDS cases between 2001 and 2005, \$3.1 million is no longer enough for prevention, said Ald. Thomas Tunney (44th). At Wednesday's City Council meeting, Tunney introduced an ordinance requesting the increase in prevention funding.

According to Tunney's ordinance, there are an estimated 28,000 people living with HIV in Chicago. African Americans are only 36 percent of the general population, but 55 percent of newly diagnosed adult HIV cases. In 2003, HIV/AIDS was the leading cause of death for Black men aged 34 to 44.

The additional dollars could save the city \$4.6 million in health costs, Tunney said.

"We are losing the battle in the number of new cases and not just in minority communities. This is something I feel very passionate about. We can work on a better budget," Tunney said.

Without the additional monies Prevention Partnership, Inc., director Daryl Edwards fears the Austin-area organization will have to end its youth program next year.

"If some new funds don't appear, that program is out for the 29th Ward," Edwards said.

Teens, he added, are at greater risk for contracting the disease because they are

doing a lot of sexual experimentation.

"They're not fully aware of what all the dangers are. They think it's all fun and games," Edwards said. "(Sex) is a human impulse. Unless you put the right message in the brain, the body will respond.

"The problem is not the city's budget, but more the way the funding is distributed," Edwards said.

Getting the money budgeted is the first hurdle, getting a more equal distribution of the funds is the next challenge, he added.

The Chicago HIV Prevention Planning Group determines how prevention dollars are spent. The group tends to prioritize the allocation of funds toward those groups considered statistically high-risk, including men who have sex with men, women in the sex industry and IV drug users, Edwards said.

"For the rest of the African American community, there's nothing. It just doesn't make sense. All the funding is going to gay, white men, but prevention should serve all populations. The rest of us need programs too," Edwards said. "We need to fill in the gaps to those groups not being targeted. To, me it's madness."

HPPG works with the Chicago Department of Public Health for the purpose of developing and overseeing the implementation of a comprehensive HIV prevention plan to reduce or stop the spread of HIV.

The Chicago HPPG did not return *Defender* calls seeking comment Wednesday.

Rev. Charles Straight, assistant pastor of the Wesley United Methodist Church on the South Side and a board member of the AIDS Foundation of Chicago, said the stigma of the disease and homophobia are driving up infection rates in the Black community.

"Chicago has a moral responsibility to fund (prevention) for the good of public health," Straight said. "We know that prevention works, but we need partners who are willing to help us."

Tunney's ordinance calls for additional funding not to be drawn from existing Health Department funds, but instead calls for the budget director to choose from other funds available.

Ald. Freddrenna Lyle (6th) said she is confident the additional funding will be approved.

"Everything is a juggling act down here, but I'm sure we will be able to get something done," Lyle said. "But whatever we do today, we're going to have to do it again next year."

With heterosexual transmission at about 16 percent, treatment of the disease costs 10 times more than what Edwards and others are asking for money to prevent transmission.

"There's still no cure. So without prevention, you're looking at a lifetime of medication to sustain," Edwards said.

While it's important to talk to teens because puberty sends their hormones out of control, adults also need to know about risk factors.

"With adults, it's more common sense. We just give them a wake-up call and a reminder to 'be careful when you're out there.' We're just reinforcing because people forget," Edwards said.

Even if the City Council approves the nearly \$2 million increase in HIV/AIDS prevention, the money will likely not be enough to get to all the prevention entities in the city, Edwards said.

"It's still not a lot of money, \$1.7 million. But it's something. The city should be able to take care of people a little bit better than that," he added.