


AIDS Foundation OF CHICAGO

Embracing the Future



In its *2008 Policy Priorities - Embracing the Future*, the AIDS Foundation of Chicago (AFC) presents a list of timely and strategic actions needed to advance the fight against HIV/AIDS in Illinois and across the country. The plan that follows is a roadmap and resource for policymakers, AIDS advocates, and the general public. We hope you will join us in championing sound HIV/AIDS policy and law in 2008. Working together, we can embrace and shape our future.

(312) 922-2322

aidschicago.org

aidschicago.org/community

aidsrunwalk.org

At the beginning of 2008, the challenges facing HIV/AIDS advocates remain daunting. Long-awaited national data is widely expected to show a 30-50 percent increase in annual HIV infections: from 40,000 to as high as 60,000. The epidemic in the U.S. continues to disproportionately affect gay men and other men who have sex with men, injection drug users, and increasing numbers of women, particularly from communities of color. Equally alarming, tens of thousands of Illinoisans with HIV/AIDS remain under- and un-insured and/or undiagnosed, and only a fraction of existing needs for life-saving HIV prevention, care, and housing services are currently being met in Illinois and across the country.

At the same time, the nation is witnessing the most competitive field of presidential candidates in recent memory. These factors create opportunities to directly engage policymakers at all levels to respond to the expanding HIV/AIDS epidemic.

The following plan is the product of a far-reaching process to gather community input on AFC's 2008 policy agenda. We thank the hundreds of AIDS advocates from across Illinois who provided valuable input. With help from AFC's Policy/Advocacy Committee, the dozens of suggestions were ranked and organized into eight priority issues.

Working together we can and must mobilize support to address elevated rates of HIV transmission, protect the rights of affected communities, and do all we can to ensure people with and at risk for HIV/AIDS gain access to needed testing, prevention, healthcare, housing, and support services. This is a time of uncertainty and change for the HIV/AIDS community, one that should not be feared, but rather embraced.



Summary: AFC's 2008 Policy Priorities

PREVENTION

1. Condom access
2. Comprehensive sex education
3. Drug overdose prevention
4. Microbicide Development Act

CARE

5. HIV testing funding
6. Housing services
7. Healthcare expansion
8. Expedited STD treatment

Each part of this plan relies on complementary activities to create momentum, reach affected communities, and address—directly and indirectly—the factors fueling HIV transmission and unmet healthcare, housing, and social service needs.

Participants in our policy development process determined the eight priority initiatives as those having the highest probability of achieving measurable and immediate results. AFC will continue to work in many other areas unlisted in this report, including sterile syringe access, addressing discrimination and stigma, Medicaid and Medicare, and AIDS-related appropriations.



Your mission, should you choose to accept it ...

Illinois HIV/AIDS Lobby Days
April 1-2, 2008 Springfield, IL

Registration and partial scholarship info:
aidschicago.org/events/lobby_day_2008.php

For details, contact Jim Merrell at (312) 334-0963 or jmerrell@aidschicago.org.

Prevention

The following initiatives are designed to slow the spread of HIV through targeted, systemic changes and expanded access to evidence-based strategies.

- 1. Expand condom access and widely promote condom use, including in prisons:** *Broad-based, publicly-funded, and well-promoted programs to expand access to male and female condoms and lubricants are desperately needed to help Illinoisans prevent HIV transmission.*

For sexually active individuals, consistent and correct use of latex or polyurethane condoms is the most effective means to prevent HIV transmission and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Despite this knowledge, many at-risk communities lack easy, affordable access to condoms. New York City has demonstrated an effective response by launching the nation's first condom initiative, which will have distributed 18 million free condoms in the program's first year. Chicago should follow suit and develop an equally comprehensive program. Illinois should also permit condom distribution in state prisons. Other programs across the country and around the globe have proven that condom access poses no threat to prison security while providing much needed prevention tools for an extremely vulnerable population. HIV rates are at least three times higher in jails and prisons than in the general population. Despite the reality of consensual sex in prisons, inmates are currently afforded no means of protecting themselves or their partners from HIV or STDs.


- 2. Fund and support comprehensive sexuality education:** *Congress and Illinois should eliminate funding for ineffective and potentially harmful abstinence-only-until-marriage programs and instead support age-appropriate, science-based, and comprehensive sex education.*

Despite broad-based public support for open and honest sex education, many Illinois school districts provide young people with misleading and inaccurate curricula. Biased information with factual errors may put GLBT youth at an increased risk for HIV infection. In 2007, a congressionally mandated study found that abstinence-only programs had absolutely no impact in delaying the age at which young people become sexually active.

Alarming, other studies have documented increased rates of oral intercourse, unprotected anal intercourse, and lower rates of condom use among abstinence-only program participants. Comprehensive sex education ensures that young people have accurate information about methods to protect themselves and their partners when they *do* become sexually active. It's time for Illinois and the nation to reject ideologically driven agendas and put our young people's health first.

3. Help individuals who inject drugs prevent death from overdose: *Illinois lawmakers should enact legislation to expand drug overdose prevention services statewide.*

HIV infection and drug overdose are among the myriad health concerns affecting people who inject drugs. Services for users should include strategies to help them stay alive, safe, and free from HIV and hepatitis infection while supporting those who are ready to accept substance abuse treatment services. Fortunately, a safe and inexpensive medication, naloxone, can reverse opiate overdoses and keep drug users alive. A Chicago program has trained drug users to reverse overdoses and saved more than 750 lives since 2001.



Learn about the HIV/AIDS positions of presidential candidates at aidsvote.org

4. Enact the Microbicide Development Act: *The federal government should speed efforts to develop new prevention tools.*

Still in development, microbicides are new tools to slow sexual transmission of HIV and other STDs when applied topically. While the federal government centrally coordinates research on such strategies as vaccines, microbicide research is scattered between several federal offices and agencies. The **Microbicide Development Act** (MDA) would establish a branch within the National Institute of Allergies and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) devoted to coordinating microbicide research within NIAID, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and authorize funding increases needed to carry out this work. In 2007, NIAID announced that it would create a dedicated microbicide branch within the agency, embracing several of the provisions included in the MDA. However, the MDA must still be enacted to ensure that the necessary resources are appropriated to carry out an aggressive research agenda on candidate vaginal and rectal microbicide products.

Care

The following policies impact the delivery of essential HIV testing, healthcare, and support services for people with and at risk for HIV.

5. Increase government funding for voluntary HIV testing services:

The state and federal governments must provide increased funding to expand the number of providers offering, and the number of clients accepting, voluntary HIV testing services.

An estimated 10,000 Illinoisans remain unaware of their HIV-positive status, a crisis that contributes to poor utilization of lifesaving HIV treatments, support services, and prevention measures designed to slow the spread of the epidemic. Passed last year, Illinois Public Law 95-0007 aims to help reach Illinoisans with undiagnosed HIV by modernizing state testing laws. Unfortunately, funding remains insufficient to adequately expand voluntary testing services, train medical providers, and reach the under- and un-insured. To address these challenges, AFC urges the Governor and members of the Illinois General Assembly to support a new \$2 million appropriation for HIV testing expansion.

6. Expand housing options for people with HIV/AIDS: *The federal government must expand the availability and diversity of housing assistance programs for all populations impacted by HIV/AIDS.*

Half of all people living with HIV/AIDS are estimated to be homeless or dealing with serious housing instability. While Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS (HOPWA) and other federal programs have helped tens of thousands of people, far too few homeless or unstably housed people with HIV/AIDS receive the help they need to improve their lives. New programs such as the **National Housing Trust Fund** offer hope for delivering more assistance to those in need, and should be enacted immediately by Congress. Congress should also increase funding for HOPWA and other housing services to address high rates of housing instability and homelessness among HIV-positive people. With safe, affordable, and stable housing, people with HIV/AIDS can achieve improved treatment adherence, practice good nutrition, reduce high-risk behaviors, and improve their health outcomes.

7. Make good on promises to enact comprehensive healthcare reform: *Federal and state lawmakers should pass legislation expanding access to healthcare for people living with HIV/AIDS and others who lack coverage.*

Almost one-half of all people living with HIV in the U.S. receive no treatment whatsoever for their HIV disease—a tragedy of untold proportions for the world’s richest and most powerful country. To remedy this situation, Congress should swiftly (1) enact the **Early Treatment for HIV Act** to allow states to expand Medicaid coverage to low-income people with HIV before they become disabled; (2) allow AIDS Drug Assistance Program spending on drug costs for **Medicare beneficiaries** to count toward individuals’ steep out-of-pocket prescription drug spending requirements; and (3) adequately fund the **Ryan White HIV/AIDS Treatment Act**. In addition, Illinois

lawmakers must enact **state healthcare expansion proposals** that will contain costs and provide coverage for an estimated 1.8 million uninsured Illinoisans, including tens of thousands of low-income people with HIV/AIDS.

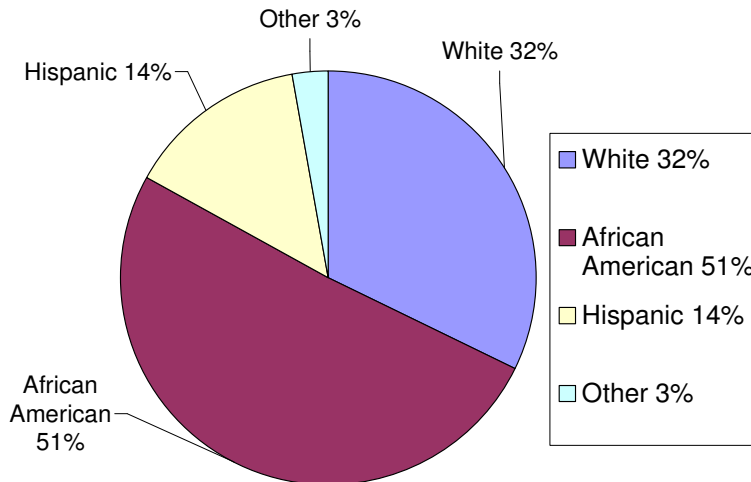
Endorse the call to action for a national AIDS strategy in the U.S. Learn more at nationalaidsstrategy.org.

8. Permit and fund expedited partner therapy to reduce sexually transmitted diseases (STDs): *To stem the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, Illinois should follow other jurisdictions and allow physicians to provide antibiotics to the partners of people newly diagnosed with STDs.*

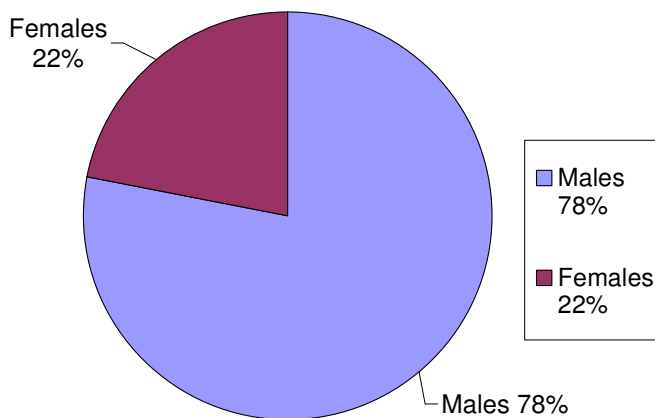
Expedited Partner Therapy (EPT), recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), would allow doctors to treat the partners of individuals diagnosed with Chlamydia or gonorrhea without a physical examination. Given ample evidence that STDs fuel HIV transmission, expedited partner therapy is a safe and effective strategy to reduce untreated STDs and prevent HIV.

HIV/AIDS in Illinois

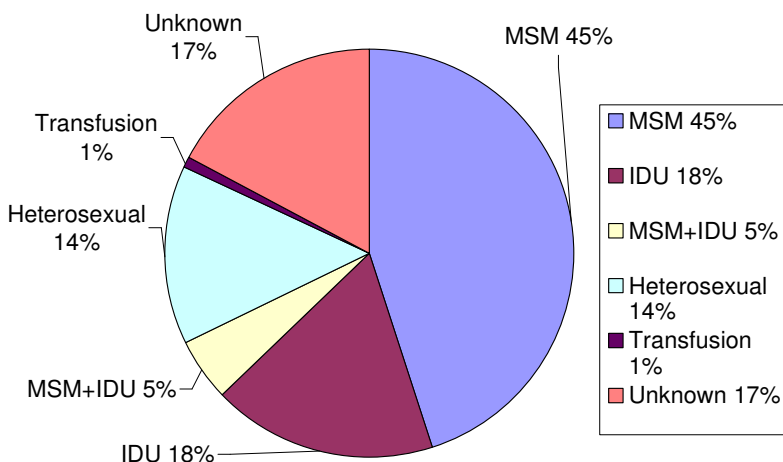
HIV/AIDS Cases by Race/Ethnicity – 2006



Reported Illinois HIV/AIDS Cases by Gender –2006



Mode of Transmission for Illinois HIV/AIDS Cases - 2006



For the Record

AFC estimates that **40,000-42,000** people are living with HIV/AIDS in Illinois. **An estimated 10,000 HIV-positive Illinoisans (25%) do not know they are infected with HIV.**

Of the **32,194** people reported to be living with HIV/AIDS in Illinois, **16,414 are African-American; 10,334 are white; and 4,541 are Latino.**

Gay men and men who have sex with men (MSM) continue to be hit hardest by HIV. 56% of men diagnosed with HIV/AIDS in Illinois in 2006 were infected through sex with another man, including 73% of whites, 57% of Latinos, and 43% of African-American.

In Illinois, **African-American women represent more than two-thirds (68%) of women living with HIV.**

About 18% of people living with HIV in Illinois were infected by **injection drug use**. An additional 14% were infected through **heterosexual sex**.

86% of people living with HIV in Illinois reside in the Chicago metro area, and **Cook County is home to 79% of the HIV-positive population. 14% live downstate.**

Sources: U.S Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Illinois Department of Public Health, Chicago Department of Public Health, Kaiser Family Foundation.

Information compiled by:

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