

AFC in the News

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## **Letters to the editor**

### *Reality check on AIDS*

The Sept. 17 cover of the Chicago Free Press, emblazoned with a gigantic red-ribbon and tongue-in-check headline ("This man does not have HIV") evoked the kind of satire one might expect from The Onion rather than an LGBT weekly. But CFP's HIV/AIDS coverage was nothing but serious, informing readers of the continuing struggle to curb the spread of HIV among gay and bisexual men in the U.S.

More than half of the estimated 56,000 individuals who become HIV-infected each year are gay/bisexual men. Black gay men ages 13-29 and white gay men ages 30-39 account for the first and second most-affected populations. As stated at a recent congressional hearing, inadequate federal funding and other policy barriers compound the prevention challenges around a disease that remains highly stigmatizing and difficult for most people to confront candidly.

The CFP article "Photo causes fears about man's HIV status" (Sept. 17) brilliantly illuminates how severe AIDS stigma affects even allies and friends of people with HIV/AIDS. CFP's editorial ("Then and now," Sept. 17) rightly calls on readers, LGBT institutions and public officials to rally support for the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Instilling a heightened sense of community among gay men living with and affected by HIV/AIDS is one of the cornerstone objectives of the AIDS Foundation of Chicago's citywide initiative called Project CRYSP. Working with partner organizations Test Positive Aware Network, Howard Brown Health Center and the Center on Halsted, AFC sponsors community forums, podcasts and an innovative and gay-affirming sexual health website called LifeLube.org, all designed to promote greater dialogue, awareness and resourcefulness in the face of the epidemic. Our partners conduct online outreach to gay men, train medical providers on best practices to engage gay men around substance use and sponsor rigorous evaluation to better understand both gay men's risk-taking triggers as well as the conditions supporting gay men in remaining HIV free.

Our recently launched condom education campaign, called "Love the One You're With," is designed to renew community support for condom visibility and access. We are also one of the principal architects of a broad-based campaign to call for the creation of a National AIDS Strategy to embolden the federal response to HIV/AIDS

domestically. Working with other leading AIDS organizations across the country, we launched [www.nationalaidsstrategy.org](http://www.nationalaidsstrategy.org) to collect individual and organizational endorsements for development of a National AIDS Strategy.

Presidential candidate Barack Obama has made development and implementation of a national AIDS plan a central component of his AIDS-response platform. By contrast, John McCain has yet to describe his plans on domestic AIDS if elected president. Changing the course of the epidemic will take continued resolve and attention at every level, from the grassroots to the Halls of Congress. The Chicago Free Press is commended for not skirting from this reality.

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