New HIV Infection Figures From CDC Underscore Need for National AIDS Strategy for the U.S.

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The new HIV infection figures released today (Aug. 3) by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) increase the estimate of new HIV infections in 2006 from 40,000 to 56,000 annually, with a range of 48,200 to 64,500. Though the agency says the one-year revision does not necessarily indicate an ongoing increase in the annual estimated infection rate, the new estimate demonstrates that HIV infection rate is not falling and may very possibly be increasing significantly.

The new estimates were published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) and presented publicly today at the International AIDS Conference in Mexico City. The revision also includes a back-calculation revealing that, for the last 15 years, infection rates were approximately 25 to 50 percent higher than the long-held 40,000 annual estimate. This figure is known as incidence, while the overall number of people living with HIV is known as prevalence.

The CDC estimates reveal a steady rise in infections occurring since the early 1990s, with increases primarily among gay men and African Americans.

The revised estimates of new HIV infections in 2006 also reveal that:

- Male-to-male sex accounted for 53 percent of HIV transmissions
- African Americans comprised 45 percent of new infections
- 34 percent of new infections occurred among people ages 13 to 29; with another 31 percent occurring among people ages 30 to 39
- 73 percent of HIV transmissions occurred among men

“These new estimates paint a soberingly accurate portrait of the AIDS epidemic and reveal an utter lack of investment in prevention research and programs, especially for gay men and African Americans,” said Mark Ishaug, president/CEO of the AIDS Foundation of Chicago (AFC). “The federal government must commit to speeding up the roll-out of new interventions with urgency. It’s flat out embarrassing that nearly three decades into the epidemic of our lifetime, the United States still has no comprehensive strategy to prevent HIV transmission, increase access to HIV care, and reduce racial disparities in the epidemic.”

AFC director of advocacy Jim Pickett noted that where infection rates for other populations are holding steady or showing slight declines, HIV infections among gay men tragically continue to climb.

“This is a direct result of years of policy and programs that demonize and ignore the sexual health needs of gay men, especially African-American and Latino gay men who bear the brunt of
the epidemic in the U.S.,” Pickett said. “Gay men of all colors face significant health disparities that directly impact the incidence and prevalence of HIV in their lives. We must prioritize a holistic, asset-based gay men's health agenda that goes well beyond a "navel to knee" focus. We must also address their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health needs that, when neglected, foster the conditions in which HIV thrives.”

As a local and national leader in the fight against AIDS, AFC has been working to prevent new HIV infections among men who have sex with men and African Americans through several initiatives that it funds in Chicago, including:

- Project CRYSP a partnership with the Test Positive Aware Network, the Center on Halsted and the Howard Brown Health Center that addresses the underlying reasons why gay men fail to take sexual precautions, including depression, other psychological problems and substance abuse.

- The South Side Women’s Collaborative which sends health outreach educators into beauty salons and other shops that cater to African American and Latino women to educate and refer patrons who might benefit from HIV testing and care.

*Founded by community activists and physicians in 1985, the AIDS Foundation of Chicago is a catalyst for local, national, and international action on HIV/AIDS. Learn more about AFC at aidschicago.org*