

Total Health Awareness Team

"To prevent infection and transmission of HIV, Hepatitis and other STDs within at risk communities."

ATTN: Members of the House Human Services Appropriations Committee

RE: HIV Prevention Program Funding Considerations

Date: January 20, 2010

Honorable Members of the Committee:

I am providing you this letter as part of a collaborative community driven effort to ask for the State's support of crucial HIV Prevention services. This effort is in response to the State's recent announcement regarding the devastating proposed funding cuts to HIV Prevention programs in 2010.

The Total Health Awareness Team is a primary provider of disease prevention services for Northern Illinois. We have been providing services to the communities of Northern Illinois for over thirteen years. Defined as the State of Illinois' HIV Prevention Region One, our geographical area of Northwestern Illinois is comprised of the ten counties - Boone, Carroll, DeKalb, Jo Daviess, Lee, Ogle, Stephenson, Whiteside, Rock Island and Winnebago. Our base of operations is located in the City of Rockford which bears the preponderance of reported HIV cases in Region One. ***We are the sole provider of syringe exchange and comprehensive harm/risk reduction services for this vast geographical area.***

Services provided through our agency included:

- Prevention Case Management
- HIV testing
- Hepatitis & STD Integration Services
- Real AIDS Prevention Project for African Americans
- Popular Opinion Leader Project for high-risk gay men
- Group support program for HIV+ individuals
- Overdose Prevention & Response Services & Training
- Safer Behavior Supply Distribution Services

Our agency provides an average of 3,000 service units to approximately 750 unduplicated individuals each year. The majority of our clients are low/no income persons from underserved and underrepresented communities; many are homeless. We serve male (~60%), female (40%), and transgendered (<1%), individuals. Our racial breakdowns are >60% Caucasian, >30% Black and ~5% are Latino/Other.

"Celebrating Over 13 Years of Excellence in Caring for our Community!"

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This information does not really mean much until we look at the impact that these services have had on the HIV epidemic in our communities. Thanks in part to the State's past support of HIV Prevention funding and due in large part to the providers of HIV Prevention for our at risk populations and communities, ***the State of Illinois has seen a drastic reduction of injection drug use related transmissions of HIV from 2002 to date. If this momentum is maintained and adequately funded this could lead to an almost complete elimination of this type of disease transmission!***

While this is awesome news for the communities of Illinois, it has currently spelled disaster for the providers responsible for the success as the proposed HIV prevention funding cuts combined with the proposed almost "purely epidemic based" funding allocations by the Department of Public Health for 2010 mean even larger funding cuts for some of the most effective and evidence-based programs in the State. Furthermore, if left unaddressed, this will mean the elimination of these programs altogether and a resultant regression in the HIV epidemic that will lead to an even larger demand for costly care services from what is already a greatly overburdened healthcare system.

Our agency is a prime example of these disproportionate funding cuts; we have been asked to accept a 77% decrease in funding for 2010. This equates to the loss of five employees and more importantly the inability of our agency to maintain our current evidence-based interventions or implement the State's proposed HIV Prevention interventions for 2010; this means that over 3,500 of our agency's primary and secondary clients will be without access to "maintenance level" services .

In addition to our funding cut, in Region One 50% of the HIV Prevention providers were completely defunded. The burden being placed on the remaining HIV Prevention community to sustain these services is dauntingly overwhelming. While the State would most assuredly find that providers in the HIV Prevention community are and have always been particularly creative in finding alternative ways to "get the job done", the State's current proposal seems unjust, unfair and irresponsible.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, our staff, clients and communities of Northern Illinois, I extend our thanks to and support of the members of the Committee as you make these most crucial of funding decisions. We do hope you will seriously consider the value of insuring HIV Prevention continues to be a priority over care knowing the potential costs savings and health benefits for the entire State of Illinois.

Respectfully,

JBryan Latham
Executive Director