



## Preparing for the announcement of the National HIV/AIDS Strategy

AIDS advocates anticipate President Barack Obama will soon release a comprehensive, five-year plan of action to combat the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the United States.

**Announcement of the Strategy will be historic.** After nearly 30 years battling HIV/AIDS, the federal government will set a new, coordinated plan of action designed to achieve greater progress against the epidemic. President Obama made creation and implementation of the Strategy his flagship HIV/AIDS initiative; his Administration has been working on the Strategy since assuming power in 2009.

The Strategy will define strategic approaches in the three goals established by the President: reduce HIV infections; improve access to high-quality care for people living with HIV; and decrease HIV-related health disparities. It will also describe ways to improve management and coordination within and beyond the federal government.

According to Jeffrey Crowley, Director of the White House Office of National AIDS Policy, the Strategy will articulate a concise set of priorities and embrace the following principles<sup>1</sup>:

- Rely on evidence-based programming
- Set ambitious targets
- Establish a timeline
- Require annual reporting on progress towards established targets
- Specify agency/agencies accountable for activities
- Address groups at elevated risk for HIV
- Address structural issues, such as housing
- Promote coordinated efforts across the government
- Involve other sectors (businesses, CBOs, professional organizations, others)

**Will the Strategy achieve those goals?** That will likely depend on whether the Strategy identifies ways to improve the federal response and how well all of us, in government as well as in the community, can implement the plan. Ideally, the Strategy will serve as a powerful advocacy tool for years to come.

**This document offers ideas of how to best use this unprecedented announcement, including core concepts for communications and ideas on how to leverage the Strategy's release to draw local and national attention to urgent issues in our communities.**

## **We helped make this happen**

The release of the Strategy is the culmination of a multi-year campaign by a broad range of people living with HIV and other AIDS advocates who championed the development and implementation of a single plan in order to accelerate effective responses to the epidemic. Continued advocacy will be needed to make the Strategy as effective as possible. Learn more about advocacy on the Strategy as well as the federal government's process of developing it, steps to gather input, and specific recommendations, at <http://nationalaidsstrategy.org>.

## **What initiatives will be included in the National HIV/AIDS Strategy?**

While AIDS advocates will need to wait until the Strategy is released to learn *exactly* what it says, the White House hosted a community meeting and briefing call on May 14 to signal key issues under consideration. *Access a recording of the call at: <http://tinyurl.com/onap-call>.*

Mr. Crowley summarized the Strategy's vision:

**"The United States will become a place where new HIV infections are rare, and when they do occur every person regardless of age, race, ethnicity, their sexual orientation, or their social/economic status will have unfettered access to high-quality, life-extending care, free from stigma or discrimination."**

Specific ideas include:

- Refocus on communities where HIV is prevalent
- Expand access to evidence-based HIV prevention methods
- Create a seamless system from HIV positive diagnosis to HIV care
- Increase the number of clinical providers of high-quality care
- Support people with co-infections (such as hepatitis C)
- Address other social determinants, such as housing and poverty
- End stigma and discrimination against HIV-positive individuals
- Redouble efforts to educate people of all ages about HIV
- Create new community-level approaches to reduce HIV transmission
- Increase coordination among federal government agencies
- Increase federal coordination with state, territorial, tribal, and local governments and community-based agencies

## Suggested Actions

**With the power of the bully pulpit, the President's Strategy offers AIDS advocates a unique opportunity to raise public awareness and support for the fight against HIV/AIDS.** It gives us the opportunity to leverage local and national attention to urgent issues affecting our communities.

*Consider one or more actions to put the Strategy document to immediate use:*

- Issue a press release about the Strategy (see press release tips below).
- Conduct a detailed analysis of the Strategy, comparing it to the criteria below, coalition recommendations (several examples are posted at <http://nationalaidsstrategy.org>), and/or your own recommendations.
- Write about the Strategy on your website, blog, Facebook page, etc., and talk about it at the meetings you attend.
- Share information about the Strategy with your Congressional delegation, state lawmakers, and other elected and appointed officials (e.g., the state Medicaid director, housing officials, public health leaders, correctional department staff, education officials, and others).
- Host a public meeting to discuss the Strategy in light of the HIV-related issues and needs in your community, jurisdiction, state or region.
- Write an op-ed or letter to the editor about the Strategy and what it means to you, your community and the nation as a whole.
- Reference the Strategy in advocacy fact sheets and communications.

*Please forward your press release or statement to [info@nationalaidsstrategy.org](mailto:info@nationalaidsstrategy.org).*

*The Coalition for a National AIDS Strategy will highlight community reactions on its blog at <http://nationalaidsstrategy.org>.*

## Formulating a Critical Assessment of the Strategy

The Strategy is likely to elicit an array of opinions and reactions that are as diverse as the AIDS community itself. AIDS advocates and organizations will need to carefully read the Strategy and assess its potential to chart a new, bolder course of action against HIV/AIDS. Below are examples of key criteria you may consider in evaluating the Strategy's likely impact to reshape and improve domestic HIV-related outcomes.

*An effective, outcomes-oriented Strategy **MUST**:*

- Establish short- and long-term priorities among a manageable set of activities/initiatives
- Set clear, ambitious targets to achieve each goal
- Focus efforts where the epidemic is most acute
- Address structural vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and poor health outcomes
- Engage people living with HIV/AIDS, among other stakeholders, in solutions
- Add other components of an effective Strategy:

*To bolster chances it is fully realized, the Strategy **MUST**:*

- Improve federal management and authority over HIV-related activities
- Ensure greater coordination (within and beyond the federal government)
- Commit to regularly monitoring and accountability mechanisms
- Detail clear implementation steps, responsible entities, and timelines
- Describe both new funding needed and strategic investments for existing resources
- Other steps:

### **Key Elements for Press Releases, Talking Points or Written Responses:**

- ✓ **Set the context:** Underscore that HIV/AIDS remains an urgent public health concern in the U.S. and in your community. Reference a few compelling statistics to substantiate your statements.
- ✓ **Explain the Strategy's significance:** While other plans have emerged in the past, this is the first comprehensive, national plan to leverage support from multiple government agencies and the President himself.
- ✓ **Describe how the Strategy came about:** The Strategy is the result of aggressive AIDS advocacy over the past three years. It galvanized community and political support around a simple, compelling idea: dramatic gains fighting HIV/AIDS in the U.S. can be realized with bold federal leadership focused on achieving defined outcomes.

- ✓ **List important next steps:** Government leaders and community stakeholders will need to work together to implement the bold directions anticipated in the Strategy. In some cases, approaches may need to change course or be revised entirely. Ushering needed changes will require leadership, advocacy, and resolve.
- ✓ **Everyone has a stake in the Strategy's success:** Efforts to fully realize the Strategy will rely on multiple stakeholders working together. No single agency or decision-making body (public or private) can do it alone.
- ✓ **Short-term and long-term needs:** The Strategy must help meet immediate needs improving HIV prevention, expanding access to care, and mitigating HIV-related health disparities. Over time, the Strategy must guide efforts to change systems to realize large, important gains fighting the epidemic.
- ✓ **Social determinants of health matter:** While efforts against the epidemic must address individual needs, it is crucial to confront structural vulnerabilities -- such as homelessness/housing instability, mass imprisonment, substance use, poverty, and homophobia, among other factors -- that heighten HIV risk for entire groups and communities.
- ✓ **More focused investments:** The Strategy must help decision-makers achieve better investments with current and new resources. But without question, meeting the Strategy's aspirational goals will also require the dedication of new, targeted investments.

**More Information:** Visit the Coalition for a National AIDS Strategy online at <http://nationalaidsstrategy.org> for background and briefing documents about the Strategy.

***Three ideas for the top of your press release:***

HOMETOWN (DATE)—AGENCY X pledges its support to the Obama Administration to achieve the goals established in the National HIV/AIDS Strategy, unveiled today. The White House plan recognizes that greater progress fighting HIV/AIDS can be realized with better planning and coordination, accountability mechanisms, and efforts to expand proven HIV prevention and care activities.

HOMETOWN (DATE)—AGENCY Y applauds the Obama Administration's new national HIV/AIDS plan of action, especially efforts to \_\_\_\_\_. While supportive of the plan, Congress and the Administration must continue to consider \_\_\_\_\_, which [is/are] essential for the fight against HIV/AIDS [locally, regionally, nationally].

HOMETOWN (DATE)—THE Z COALITION calls on Congress to meet the immediate and long-term challenges in the U.S. fight against the epidemic as described in the Obama Administration's newly released HIV/AIDS Strategy for the U.S. Federal decision-makers should especially consider \_\_\_\_\_ as they chart efforts to implement the bold new plans, which will require leadership and unprecedented coordination within and beyond the federal government.

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<sup>i</sup> NHAS Development Enters the Final Stretch: <http://nationalaidsstrategy.org/2010/nhas-development-enters-the-final-stretch/#more-330>