

May 13, 2013

The Honorable Thomas Frieden, MD, MPH
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30333

Dear Dr. Frieden:

The 39 organizations below, supportive of policies and programs to improve adolescent health, specifically their sexual health and well-being, write to call attention to the important and critical role of school-based HIV- and other STD-prevention efforts and urge they be supported as fiscal year (FY) 2013 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) final funding is implemented, and in future CDC funding discussions and decisions. We further request that the Division of Adolescent and School Health (DASH), responsible for administering school-based interventions vital to CDC's Winnable Battles, continues to remain a stand-alone division within the National Center of HIV, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and Tuberculosis Prevention (NCHHSTP). While we were disappointed that the President's FY 2014 budget did not replace the devastating cut the DASH program sustained in FY 2012 funding, we are thankful that the President's proposal would maintain the program's current funding. Additionally, we applaud the effort to establish \$3 million in dedicated funding to evaluate HIV school health activities, and if allocated, would look forward to opportunities to discuss the implementation of such evaluation.

To effectively slow and diminish the HIV and other STD epidemics in this country, we must educate our nation's young people about HIV and other STDs. CDC's data show that young people aged 13 – 24 account for one-in-four of the estimated 50,000 new HIV infections each year; and while comprising only 25 percent of the sexually active population in the U.S, young people aged 15 – 24 contract about half of the 19 million STDs acquired annually. Additionally, rates of new HIV infections among young Black men who have sex with men aged 13 – 29 increased by 48 percent between 2006 and 2009. Establishing healthy behaviors during adolescence is easier and more effective than trying to change behaviors during adulthood; therefore, it is imperative that support continues for school-based HIV and other STD prevention efforts focused on populations that are most affected. Preventing and reducing youth incidence rates is vital to the goal of reaching an AIDS-free generation.

DASH is the only federally funded adolescent program working to assist with HIV and other STD prevention efforts within our nation's schools. After families, schools are where more than 50 million adolescents receive their social, physical, and intellectual development. Responsible for a number of key years in the development of young people, schools present a unique opportunity to impart critical sexual health information necessary to address the nation's HIV and other STD epidemics.

However, we know that fewer youth are receiving information about HIV through their school—for the first time in over a decade, more than 15 percent of students reported not being taught about AIDS or HIV in school. Rather than being strengthened to correct this downward trend, DASH resources are being scaled back, as the program received a devastating 25 percent cut in FY 2012. As a result of this cut, the formerly nationwide program that had funded more than 80 states, territories, tribes and local education agencies will now be reduced to funding fewer than 30 education agencies. Given this funding reality, the 20 year infrastructure investments for developing these school based interventions to provide sexual health prevention and well-being information to students may be dismantled in just one year.

Addressing HIV in our communities truly takes a village—health departments, education agencies, parents, school health professionals, government-based-, community-based- and faith-based organizations—just to name a few. DASH plays a pivotal role in encouraging communication and collaboration among these critical partners and, too often, is the only entity bringing them together. The role of DASH in working within education agencies is unique to interventions funded through CDC and the NCHHSTP. Maintaining DASH as its own division within NCHHSTP will help ensure that this unique collaborative role remains supported.

We understand and support efforts to prioritize federal funding to reflect incidence of HIV and other STD rates. This reduction in funding and change to the DASH program, however, would significantly reduce access to HIV-, other STD-, prevention and sexual health education and services for young people across the country, hindering the National HIV/AIDS Strategy goal of educating all Americans about HIV.

Now is not the time to step back from this necessary and important federal investment. Thank you for your continued leadership in working toward the sexual health and well-being for people of all ages. We hope to count on your support for DASH’s school-based interventions that can secure the sexual health and well-being of our nation’s young people.

Sincerely,

Advocates for Youth
AIDS Alabama
AIDS Alliance for Women, Infants, Children, Youth & Families
AIDS Community Research Initiative of America
AIDS Foundation of Chicago
The AIDS Institute
AIDS Resource Center Ohio
AIDS United
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs
Cascade AIDS Project (Oregon and Southwest Washington)
Catholics for Choice
Choice USA
Family Centers Inc. (Stamford, Connecticut)
Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN)
Gay-Straight Alliance Network (GSA Network)

Georgia AIDS Coalition
HealthHIV
Healthy Teen Network
HIV Medicine Association
HIV Prevention Justice Alliance (New York, New York)
HIV Law Project
Howard Dental Center (Denver, Colorado)
Human Rights Campaign
Hyacinth AIDS Foundation (New Brunswick, New Jersey)
Minnesota AIDS Project
National Assembly on School-Based Health Care
National Association of School Nurses
National Association of State Boards of Education
National Coalition of STD Directors
National Council of Jewish Women
National Black Gay Men's Advocacy Coalition
National Family Planning & Reproductive Health Association
National Minority AIDS Council
North Carolina AIDS Action Network
Ohio AIDS Coalition
Servicios de La Raza (Denver, Colorado)
Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS)
Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine
The Women's Collective

CC: Kathleen Sebelius, MPA, Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Grant Colfax, MD, Director, Office of National AIDS Policy
Rima Khabbaz, MD, Acting Director, National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis,
STD, and TB Prevention
Howell Wechsler, EdD, MPH, Director, Division of Adolescent and School Health
John Moore, PhD, RN, Deputy Director, Division of Adolescent and School Health