



Declaration To END HIV/AIDS in America

For more than thirty years, HIV/AIDS has ravaged our nation. It has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands. It has cost us billions in health care costs and lost productivity. And it has scarred our collective soul, devastating an entire generation, while highlighting the social and systemic inequities that persist in our country. Despite advances in prevention, care and treatment, the overall rate of new infections has been stagnant for more than a decade, and is actually increasing among young gay men. And today, more Americans are living with HIV than ever before.

We, the undersigned, recognize that we are at a pivotal moment in our battle against this disease. Policy and science have aligned like never before, making it possible to realistically envision an end to this epidemic. Now our nation faces a fundamental choice: we can continue to sacrifice our public and fiscal health on the status quo, or we can choose to make the smart investments and structural changes necessary to finally end HIV/AIDS. We are committed to doing what it takes to end this epidemic and drafted this declaration to codify the values and principles that should guide our efforts. We publically dedicate our skills, faith, and resources to ending HIV/AIDS in America.

We believe that unfettered access to quality, affordable health care and HIV treatment is a fundamental human right, as is the ability to determine when to initiate that treatment. Individuals must be actively engaged in their own health care, including knowing their HIV status. For people living with HIV/AIDS this means regularly seeing their care providers and adhering to their medications once they have decided to begin treatment. Education about available medications and treatment regimens, including side effects and the importance of adherence, must be made universally available.

All Americans living with HIV/AIDS deserve to live their lives free from stigma and discrimination. They have the right to access compassionate, culturally competent services, free from judgment or reproach. They have the right to be treated with dignity and respect, and should not be forced to live in fear of prosecution under archaic criminal statutes. Their voices are essential to ending the epidemic. They are not victims, and they are much more than patients. They are equal stakeholders in the fight to end this disease, and must play a central role in identifying barriers and solutions to accessing prevention and care services.

Human sexuality is innate and everyone has the right to a healthy and fulfilling sex life. Individuals living with HIV/AIDS should make every effort to disclose their status to their partners and take steps to minimize the risk of transmission. At the same time, those who are HIV-negative are responsible for their own sexual health. Individuals living with HIV/AIDS cannot and should not bear sole responsibility for preventing transmissions. As such, comprehensive sex education must be available to all so that individuals are empowered to make decisions that will protect their own health and the health of their partners.

Moral judgments and prejudices have no place in the dissemination of prevention and care services. All individuals that are affected by and vulnerable to HIV/AIDS have a right to the compassionate provision of evidence-based prevention services, and if necessary, care and treatment, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or ability to pay. This includes drug users, sex workers and **those who have gone through the nation's correctional systems.**

We must all work to eliminate poverty, homelessness, stigma and discrimination at every level of society, as they continue to be barriers to access and retention in care and treatment. In particular, research has demonstrated that housing serves as an especially cost-effective structural intervention for both improved health outcomes and prevention of HIV/AIDS. We are committed to ensuring that high-quality, safe and affordable housing are available to all those living with and vulnerable to HIV/AIDS.

Communities that are most heavily impacted are too often marginalized, when they should be engaged in the development and implementation of strategies and interventions that meet their collective needs while protecting individual health and well being. We recognize that we cannot do this alone. We need the active support and engagement of the broader public if we are to secure the resources necessary to maintain, expand, transform and develop sustainable solutions to systemic barriers.

Finally, continued investment in research is essential, including the search for a vaccine and a cure. The immediate cessation of all new HIV infections would still leave more than 1.2 million individuals living with HIV/AIDS in America. Our goal cannot simply be to stop the spread of HIV, but its complete eradication. This necessitates a cure and vaccine. For those who can access it, advancements in care and treatment have helped transform this disease into a manageable, chronic condition. But this comes at a huge cost, both financially and personally. People living with HIV/AIDS should not be relegated to a lifetime of struggle against this disease. They deserve a renewed and invigorated commitment to finding a cure.

For the first time in over thirty years, it is possible to envision an America free from HIV/AIDS. But accomplishing this will not be easy. It will require bold, visionary leadership and the commitment of all of us to successfully translate the promise of this moment into a world without HIV/AIDS. Science and research have given us powerful tools; now we must decide to act. We, the undersigned, commit ourselves fully to realizing this dream and invite you to join us.

