



May 12, 2014

Mayor Bill de Blasio
City Hall
New York, New York 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio:

On behalf of the HIV Health and Human Services Planning Council of New York (Planning Council), I write to seek your support for lifting the ban on federal funding for syringe exchange programs (SEPs). Planning Council members include health care and service providers, governmental appointees, advocates, and people living with HIV/AIDS, all of whom are knowledgeable about the tremendous value of SEPs in reducing the transmission of viruses including HIV and Hepatitis C.

The ban on federal funding for SEPs takes the form of language inserted into the Labor, HHS, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill. The ban is a remnant of the polarized HIV/AIDS debate in the 1980s and 1990s, when some commentators wrongly claimed that providing sterile syringes would increase drug use. There is no evidence that such programs promote or increase drug use or crime. A total of eight federal studies have demonstrated that SEPs do not encourage or lead to greater drug use. On the contrary, SEPs can increase the likelihood of entering drug treatment five-fold and can provide an excellent opportunity for connecting injection drug users to other services such as screening and treatment for sexually transmitted infections and tuberculosis.

One of the greatest achievements in the field of HIV prevention during the last few years is the significant decrease in HIV prevalence rates among injection drug users (IDUs) in New York City. This is likely due to prevention programs aimed at decreasing injection risk practices by providing safe, legal access to sterile syringes at syringe exchange programs, where used syringes are exchanged for new ones free of charge. In 2012 (the most recent calendar year for which the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene has epidemiologic data), 185 injection drug users were diagnosed with AIDS. In 1993, by contrast, 6,679 injection drug users were diagnosed with AIDS.

New York City already has the largest population of injection drug users in the United States, according to the Center for Drug Use and HIV Research at New York University. Syringe exchange is a particularly valuable tool for reducing the number

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of new HIV infections at the present time, when restrictions on access to prescription opioids are leading many addicts to turn to heroin and use needles for injection.

As a federally-funded community planning body, the Planning Council is restricted from taking positions related to legislative and budgetary matters. As mayoral appointees, however, we write to encourage you to support lifting the ban on federal funding for this key public health strategy. Thank you very much for your attention to this issue.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert Cordero". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Robert" and last name "Cordero" clearly legible.

Robert Cordero, MSW
Community Co-Chair

Enclosures: Syringe Exchange Programs, AIDS United Fact Sheet, April 28, 2014

CC: Mary Bassett, MD, MPH, Commissioner, NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene
Jan Carl Park, Governmental Co-Chair, HIV Planning Council of New York