April 11, 2014

Secretary Sebelius Resigns; OMB Director Burwell to Replace Her

President Obama has accepted the resignation of Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius. During her five-year-tenure, Sebelius demonstrated a notable commitment to HIV/AIDS issues, which included implementing the National HIV/AIDS Strategy, and appearing at the Washington, D.C., International AIDS Conference in 2012. Her successes were overshadowed in the last six months after the initially poor rollout of healthcare.gov website, which failed to live up to high expectations of creating a navigable health care marketplace. Sebelius leaves on a high note, however, testifying yesterday before the Senate Finance committee that the ACA will ultimately have enrolled over 7.5 million people into the health care system, after accounting for people who attempted to join a plan on the final day of enrollment.

President Obama is expected to officially announce today the nomination of Sylvia Mathews Burwell, the director of the Office of Management and Budget, to replace Secretary Sebelius in the post of Secretary of Health and Human Services. Ms. Burwell is expected to bring a strong management style to the agency and continue to focus on implementation of the Affordable Care Act.

HHS Releases Renewed Viral Hepatitis Action Plan

Last week, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released the three year update to its “Action Plan for the Prevention, Care, & Treatment of Viral Hepatitis,” which was originally released in 2011.

The updated plan maintains the original four goals to be achieved by 2020:

- Increase in the proportion of persons who are aware of their hepatitis B virus infection, from 33% to 66%
- Increase in the proportion of persons who are aware of their hepatitis C virus infection, from 45% to 66%
- Reduce by 25% the number of new cases of HCV infection
- Eliminate mother-to-child transmission of HBV
HHS identified over 150 actions that agencies and offices will undertake between 2014 and 2016 across six priority areas identified in the original plan as well.

The plan also identifies several emerging trends to address viral hepatitis and proposes a framework around which federal, industry and community stakeholders can engage. The trends include growing awareness among disproportionately affected populations, advances in HCV treatment and testing, advances in the science of viral hepatitis and opportunities arising from the Affordable Care Act. One negative trend is an emerging epidemic of HCV infection among young people who inject drugs resulting in a call for action among stakeholders to respond.

The report was released well in advance of Hepatitis Awareness Month in May. May 19th is designated as Hepatitis Testing Day.

**House Adopts Harsh Budget Plan**

The harsh FY 2015 budget (H Con Res 96) proposed by House Budget Committee Chair Paul Ryan (R-WI) passed with a margin of two votes to reach a majority when the full House of Representatives voted on Thursday. The vote was 219-205. No Democrats voted for the budget resolution and 12 Republicans bucked their leadership to vote against the resolution. Since there are three vacant House seats, 217 votes are needed to form a majority.

As noted in last week’s *Policy Update*, the draconian Ryan budget that the House has is not good news for the federal response to HIV/AIDS. More broadly, the House budget is not good news for anyone outside of the richest 1% of the population. In an analysis released late last week, the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities reports that 69% of the spending cuts called for in the House budget come from programs that serve low-income people. The proposed freezing of the Federal Pell Grant Program awards for college education would affect a large portion of the population. The budget calls for repealing the Affordable Care Act, which would affect many millions of Americans. These are among the ways the House budget would cut federal spending by $5.1 trillion over 10 years, which includes increasing defense spending by over $480 billion and cutting non-defense discretionary (NDD) spending $791 billion below projected equestration levels. It is ironic that the vote on the Ryan budget coincided with a summit commemorating the 50th anniversary of the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, one of the most transformative pieces of progressive legislation in U.S. history.

Prior to adopting the Ryan budget, the House rejected alternative FY ’15 budget resolutions, including those introduced by Democratic members of the House Budget Committee, the Congressional Progressive Caucus, and the Congressional Black Caucus. An alternative budget introduced by the Republican Study Committee, which proposed cuts deeper than the Ryan budget, was also rejected.

As a blueprint for FY 2015, which begins Oct. 1, the House passed Ryan
budget will have little direct impact. The resolution adheres to the total discretionary spending amount of $1.014 trillion for FY 2015 in the two year (FY 2014 and FY 2015) Murray-Ryan agreement that Congress adopted and the President signed into law. Given the two year agreement, Senator Patty Murray (D-WA), who chairs the Senate Budget Committee, is not preparing a budget resolution for FY ’15 so there will not be House-Senate conference to prepare a joint FY ’15 budget resolution. Nonetheless, the Ryan budget needs to be taken seriously as a Republican policy blueprint. Congressional Republicans likely will use the House FY ’15 budget as a campaign tool for the 2014 congressional elections in November. If the Republicans maintain their House majority and regain the Senate majority, the proposals in the Ryan budget may well drive budget and appropriations legislation in the next Congress. AIDS United will continue to monitor and oppose the spending priorities outlined in the Ryan budget.

Open Enrollment Ends: A Look at the Numbers and What’s Next

An estimated 7.5 million Americans have now signed up on the health insurance marketplaces as of this week, according to the White House. Although totals are still being tallied, the preliminary numbers met the Obama administration’s original expectations. The 7.5 million figure includes only those enrolled in the private health insurance exchanges. The number of those enrolled in Medicaid, which has no enrollment deadline, has also risen sharply thanks to the expansion of Medicaid in many states.

Early studies also show notable progress for health coverage nationwide. One survey, conducted by the RAND American Life Panel, estimates that the number of insured Americans actually saw a net gain of nearly 10 million in the last six months. According to a Gallup poll released Monday, the rate of uninsured Americans is now at its lowest level since 2008, and the rate of those without insurance has fallen most sharply among African American and low-income Americans, suggesting preliminary success across the general population and among the administration’s target populations.

As the first enrollment period comes to a close and the new exchanges become established, AIDS United will be tracking issues related to people living with HIV. Issues already being raised include insurance companies’ acceptance of third-party Ryan White Program payments, questions regarding adequacy of provider networks, transparency of drug coverage in formularies, and any practices that may violate the ACA ban on discrimination by insurance companies. AIDS United will also be monitoring states that have not yet expanded Medicaid and will continue to encourage them to do so.

National Youth HIV/AIDS Awareness Day: Music, Media, and Outreach

By Bernadette Carriere
Pedro Zamora Public Policy Fellow, AIDS United

I grew up in the early 90’s, an era when HIV was considered a death sentence, an idea that was perpetuated by much of
the popular culture of the time. Music channels like MTV were among the first to take the lead to promote awareness about many issues facing young people, including HIV, and the plight of urban youth. These two issues came to an intersection on the music television station with the untimely death of rapper Eric “Eazy-E” Wright, who died in 1995, soon after being diagnosed with AIDS.

I remember watching MTV’s news cover the rapper’s death. N.W.A.’s group members, Ice Cube, Dr. Dre and MC Ren, were talking about their fallen comrade in disbelief as he would no longer be with them after contracting the fatal illness. The media frenzy surrounding his death was headline news because HIV could now look like anyone. After all, HIV was a virus associated with white gay males.

To continue reading this blog, click here.

**National Youth HIV/AIDS Awareness Day: The Need for Action**

*By Rachel Yull
Public Policy Intern, AIDS United*

This Thursday, April 10, was National Youth HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, commemorating the work that young people are doing to end the HIV/AIDS epidemic. This day gives young people the opportunity to show support as well as educate people about HIV. I have noticed a lack of young people advocating for social issues, including HIV, and I encourage all youth to get involved in the fight to end HIV in our generation. There are many things that you can do to get involved, whether getting tested at a local testing center, organizing a sexual health and HIV education program at your school, or distributing free condoms to increase access and awareness of safe practices.

Although HIV has not directly affected my close friends or family, I became an advocate after learning of the health disparities that exist within the Black community. As a young Black woman I find this day of paramount importance for people in my demographic: the incidence of HIV among Black youth has been on the rise and Black youth make up 57% of all HIV infections among young people age 18-24.

To continue reading this blog, click here.

**Announcements**

*2 Weeks Until AIDSWatch 2014 - Register Today!*
Join us for the largest annual national constituent-based advocacy event focused on HIV and AIDS in the United States. A partnership of Treatment Access Expansion Project, AIDS United and the US People Living with HIV Caucus, AIDSWatch draws hundreds of HIV-positive advocates and their allies to Washington DC to educate Members of Congress and their staff about HIV/AIDS. All participants are provided with training on current science, legislative agendas, and conducting effective meetings with their elected representation.

- Training will take place on Monday, April 28 at FHI 360 Conference Center, 1825 Connecticut Avenue NW, Washington DC
- Meetings with Congressional offices will take place throughout the day on Tuesday, April 29, and will be scheduled by regional/state coordinators.
- Registration for AIDSWatch is free and includes continental breakfast and lunch on April 28th. Meals can only be guaranteed for those who have registered by March 31, 2014.

To view the agenda, click here.

Click Here to Register

Having Trouble Getting Care? Speak Up!

Are you or a client having problems accessing HIV care or services with a health plan? We want you to Speak Up!

The Speak Up project wants to hear about difficulties people living with HIV are having accessing health care, such as:

- Problems getting prescription drugs
- Trouble accessing primary care
- Difficulty accessing HIV specialists

Go to our Speak Up web page and report any problems you or a client face with new Affordable Care Act health plans, or existing plans.

When you Speak Up, you'll help thousands of others across the country.

This national project, led by AIDS Foundation of Chicago and the Center for Health Law and Policy Innovation at Harvard Law School, will monitor, catalogue, and analyze the problems experienced by people with HIV in the new system.

Speak Up will identify issues that need to be addressed, bring them to the attention of state and federal policymakers, advocate for change, and report back to the community.

Let your voice be heard. If you can't get the care you need, Speak Up!
ACA Open Enrollment Deadline Now April 15 for Those “In Line”

The Obama administration announced on Thursday that people who were in line to enroll for health insurance through the HealthCare.gov Marketplace but could not complete the application have until April 15 to complete the enrollment process.

People who qualify for a “special enrollment period” are not subject to the April 15 deadline.

To read the HealthCare.gov posting on the April 15 deadline, click here. For more information on special enrollment, click here.

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**Webinar: The Truth About the Path to Prosperity**

**Thursday, April 17, 3:00 p.m. Eastern Time**

The webinar will show what the Ryan-House budget would mean in our communities. It will also show you why it is important to tell the truth about the "path" that this budget would take us on - and the better road we should be traveling.

**REGISTER NOW!**

The House of Representatives just passed a budget plan for FY 2015 drafted by Paul Ryan, Chair of the House Budget Committee. It is called "The Path to Prosperity," but only a select few get to go down that road. The Ryan budget demands sacrifice from nearly everyone in order to to give new multi-billion dollar tax breaks to millionaires and big corporations. It's not the law of the land now. But "The Path to Prosperity" could be our future if its rhetoric about expanding opportunity and strengthening the safety net is not countered with the truth about what the budget actually does. Join us to uncover the truth about the budget, including concrete estimates of the impacts on health care, nutrition, housing, education, and more.

**Presenters:**

Sharon Parrott, Vice President for Budget Policy and Economic Opportunity at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

Debbie Weinstein, Executive Director of the Coalition on Human Needs

A Community Expert to share the true impact of the budget

Moderator: Ellen Teller, Director of Government Relations, Food Research and Action Center

Don’t forget to register!

For background about the Ryan-House budget, click here
New Publications on PrEP from Project Inform

Project Inform has published two new booklets and revised a third on Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP). One is a workbook for women to help them assess their HIV risks and to consider PrEP if it is right for them. This was created in partnership with AVAC, Sister Love and SHERO. A second booklet has also been published to help people to advocate for themselves for PrEP access in the United States. A third book is a newly revised booklet for MSM who are considering the whether or not PrEP is a good choice for them.

Nominations Sought for CDC/HRSA Advisory Committee: Deadline April 30

Nominations are being sought for candidates to serve on the CDC/HRSA Advisory Committee on HIV, viral hepatitis, and STD Prevention and Treatment (CHAC). The CHAC provides advice to the HHS Secretary, CDC’s Director, and HRSA’s Administrator on objectives, strategies, policies, and priorities for HIV, viral hepatitis, and STD prevention and treatment efforts. Nominees will be selected from experts having experience in HIV/AIDS, viral hepatitis and STD prevention, control and treatment. Experts in the disciplines of epidemiology, laboratory practice, immunology, infectious diseases, drug abuse, behavioral science, health education, healthcare delivery, state health programs, clinical care, preventive health, medical education, health services and clinical research, healthcare financing and other related disciplines will be considered. At least four of the committee members must be living with HIV/AIDS. Members may be invited to serve for terms of up to four years.

The HHS policy stipulates that committee membership be balanced in terms of professional training and background, points of view represented and the committee's function. Consideration is given to a broad representation of geographic areas within the U.S., with equitable representation of the sexes, ethnic and racial minorities, and persons with disabilities. Nominees must be U.S. citizens, and cannot be full-time employees of the U.S. Government.

Nominations should be submitted by email or in writing, to the following address:

   Margie Scott-Cseh, Committee Management Specialist
   NCHHSTP, CDC
   1600 Clifton Road NE
   Mailstop: E07
   Atlanta, GA 30333

All nominations must be postmarked by April 30. For more information, click here to read the CDC notice.

First-Ever National HIV Is Not a Crime Conference to be Held June 2-5

The first-ever national conference on HIV criminalization will be held Monday, June 2, 2014 through Thursday, June 5, 2014 at Grinnell College in Grinnell, Iowa.

“The HIV is Not a Crime conference will provide practical
training to support grassroots organizing, community education, media training and familiarity with the legal, medical and public health issues involved to enable activists to better advocate for criminalization reform in their home states.”

To learn more about the conference and to register, visit http://www.HIVisNotACrime.com.

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RECRUITMENT: Metro Wellness & Community Centers Seeking Senior Director of HIV Programs

Metro Wellness & Community Centers, located in the Tampa Bay, Florida, area, is currently seeking a Senior Director of HIV Programs, a new position within Metro. The Senior Director of HIV Programs will lead the overall operation of the HIV/AIDS services program. The functions include planning, development, program implementation, monitoring, evaluation of policies and implementing proper procedures for the program. Programs include case management, Prevention, MAI treatment adherence and Behavioral Health. The position is responsible for five Managers/Coordinators.

This position is part of the senior management team at Metro. For the full position description and for more information on how to apply, click here.

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Families USA Affordable Care Act Resource Center Available

Families USA, a national, not-for-profit health coverage advocacy organization, provides resources for enrollment assisters, located on their online Navigator and Assister Resource Center. These resources have been developed as part of a larger project in support of the work of Affordable Care Act navigators and enrollment assisters. Click here to see consumer-friendly materials.

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Volunteer for NIAID HIV Studies

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) investigators are seeking volunteers to help improve their understanding of HIV and how it causes disease, find new tools to prevent HIV infection, and develop new and more effective treatments.

Read about volunteer opportunities for NIAID HIV studies on the NIH campus in Bethesda, Maryland.