

October 18, 2011

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC
20500

Dear President Obama:

As national organizations dedicated to improved public health outcomes for all Americans, we are writing to urge you to oppose any attempts to restore the ban on use of federal funds for syringe exchange programs – a proven, life-saving approach to preventing transmission of HIV and hepatitis, two of the major infectious disease threats facing our nation.

Current policy provides state and local governments the option of using federal funds for syringe services programs where in accordance with local policy. Several states use this flexibility to support this effective intervention as part of comprehensive strategies to address their local epidemics. We were pleased that, with your leadership, a move earlier this year to ban federal funding for syringe services programs for FY2011 was defeated. Unfortunately, three FY2012 appropriations bills in the House (Labor-HHS, Financial Services, and State/Foreign Operations) threaten to restore the ban. Once again, we need your leadership to assure that science drives U.S. policy in public health.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 12% of all new HIV infections in the United States occur among injection drug users (IDUs). Injection drug use remains the leading cause of new hepatitis C infections. Globally, injection drug use accounts for 10% of all HIV infections. Outside sub-Saharan Africa, one in three new HIV infections is the result of unsafe injection. Effective prevention for the HIV and hepatitis C epidemics among IDUs and their partners requires a combination of interventions including sterile syringe access, counseling and testing, and drug addiction treatment.

Numerous scientific studies, including several studies funded by the federal government, have established that syringe services programs, when implemented as part of a comprehensive HIV/AIDS prevention strategy, are an effective HIV prevention intervention and do not promote drug use. This position is confirmed by leading scientific experts including three former Surgeons General. Surgeon General Regina Benjamin has certified that syringe services programs do indeed reduce HIV transmission and do not increase drug use. Syringe services programs also help people access health services including treatment for addiction. Evidence further demonstrates that syringe exchange programs can advance public safety by taking syringes off the street and reducing the likelihood of injury to law enforcement officers.

Please stand with us in opposing any restoration of the ban on use of federal or District of Columbia funds for syringe services programs as you negotiate FY2012 appropriations legislation.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Pediatrics
American Nurses Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
American Public Health Association
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials
CommonHealth Action
Florida Public Health Institute
Health Resources in Action
Infectious Diseases Society of America
Louisiana Public Health Institute
National Association of County and City Health Officials
National Network of Public Health Institutes
Partnership for Prevention
Public Health Management Corporation
Public Health Solutions
Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine
Trust for America's Health