

ONE HUNDRED SIXTEENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115
Majority (202) 225-2927
Minority (202) 225-3641
February 25, 2019

The Honorable Alex M. Azar
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Azar:

We write with interest to learn more about the Administration's initiative to end the HIV epidemic in America, as recently announced by President Trump and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).¹ With over one million Americans currently living with HIV, and 50,000 newly infected every year, HIV remains one of our nation's greatest public health challenges, but it is an area where we have made significant progress in recent years.

As the Administration has acknowledged, successful HIV treatment requires early diagnosis, medical expertise, and access to pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for those at risk. Medical management is challenging, but the rewards have been remarkable; HIV has turned from a terminal diagnosis to a chronic disease in 20 years.

As we move forward, working together to fight this generational public health challenge, we are interested in learning more about the initiative announced during the President's State of the Union and the actions HHS intends to take to meet the goal of ending the HIV epidemic.

Therefore, we ask that you provide a briefing to Committee staff on the Administration's initiative, by no later than March 11, 2019, as well as answer in writing the following questions:

1. The Administration announced an ambitious goal of 75 percent reduction in new HIV infections in five years and at least 90 percent reduction in 10 years. Please explain how the Administration plans to track this progress and what resources will be deployed to reach this goal.

¹ Ending the HIV Epidemic: A Plan for America, Feb 5, 2019 (www.hhs.gov/blog/2019/02/05/ending-the-hiv-epidemic-a-plan-for-america.html).

2. As noted by the Administration, approximately 165,000 Americans are living with HIV but are not aware they have it. How does HHS intend to promote early detection and testing, especially in rural areas?
3. Given the Administration's focus on ensuring rapid and effective treatment after an HIV diagnosis, how does HHS believe changes to the Part D protected classes, as proposed by CMS on November 26, 2018 will impact these efforts?
4. Given the efficacy of needle exchanges in arresting the spread of HIV, especially when complicated by the opioid epidemic, could you please clarify the Administration's position on such programs?
5. Medicaid serves a critical role in providing coverage to individuals with HIV, ensuring access to life-saving drugs and treatment. The Administration has, however, advanced policies that have resulted in thousands of individuals losing access to Medicaid. Please explain how you will ensure that individuals with HIV do not lose access to Medicaid as a result of waivers that condition eligibility on work requirements or authorize enrollment caps.
6. Initiatives like the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program have been invaluable in providing support services, targeting at-risk, in-need, and hard-to-reach communities. These organizations are financed by the Secretary's Minority AIDS Initiative Fund (SMAIF). While I am encouraged by support of the Ryan White Foundation, could you please reconcile your stated goal of targeting in-need communities, with the President's fiscal year (FY) 2018 budget proposal, which proposed cutting funding for SMAIF? Will the Administration be investing new resources into the SMAIF moving forward?
7. The Administration's FY 2019 budget eliminated funding for the AIDS Education and Training Centers (AETCs), which are a national network of HIV clinical, education, and health service experts that train health care providers on the latest HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and care approaches, and innovations. Additionally, the budget eliminated funding for Special Projects of National Significance (SPNS) program, which supports the development of innovative models for HIV care and treatment. How does the proposal to eliminate funding for these two critical programs further the Administration's initiative to end HIV?
8. Most Title X funded agencies provide HIV prevention education, as well as infection prevention and testing in accordance with the Quality Family Planning guidelines. However, on February 22, 2019 HHS issued a final rule that would institute new restrictions on participating providers in the Title X program that could lead to many qualified family planning and preventive health care providers losing their funding or closing their doors. What impact will these changes have on the Administration's efforts to diagnose and treat HIV?

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We look forward to learning more about the Administration's initiative to end the HIV epidemic, as well the efforts this Administration will take to achieve this goal. Should you have any questions, please contact Kimberlee Trzeciak of the Majority committee staff at 202-225-3641.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Frank Pallone, Jr." in a cursive style.

Frank Pallone, Jr.
Chairman