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Groundbreaking Analyses Reveal Astonishing Rates of HIV and STDs Among America's Gay Men

Washington, DC- Today, at the National STD Prevention Conference in Atlanta, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released new data that underscore the nation's ongoing struggle to halt the spread of HIV and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) in the United States (U.S.). The data indicate that rates of HIV infection among gay men and other men who have sex with men (MSM) are more than 44 times higher than rates among heterosexual men and more than 40 times higher than women. Rates of syphilis, an STD that can facilitate HIV infection and if left untreated, may lead to sight loss and severe damage to the nervous system, are reported to be more than 46 times higher among gay men and other MSM than among heterosexual men and more than 71 times higher than among women.

"These rates, when coupled with existing data indicating that gay and bisexual men make up the majority of new HIV and syphilis infections, are further evidence that prevention for gay and bisexual men of all races must be our highest priority at all levels," said Julie M. Scofield, Executive Director of the National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors (NASTAD). "It is time to value the lives of gay men in our communities. They are fathers, brothers, sons, uncles, colleagues and friends, and it is time to fight for their lives," continued Scofield.

Despite the high rates revealed in the data released today, federal support for HIV and STD prevention has faltered. Over the last decade, federal funding for domestic HIV prevention to health departments has been cut by \$23 million and STD prevention efforts, when adjusted for inflation, have 22 percent less funding compared to seven years ago.

"This new data is a clarion call to deal with the persistent neglect of the health of gay and bisexual men across the country," said William Smith, Executive Director of the National Coalition of STD Directors (NCSD). "Thankfully, the President has recognized the situation and called for increased resources for HIV and STD prevention efforts for MSM. Now it is Congress' turn and they need to expand upon the President's request."

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According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, men as a whole are less likely to use the health care system than women and often seek care when they are experiencing critical health problems. In gay communities, men who do not access health care may not know they are infected with HIV or an STD, thus compromising their own health status. The persistence of stigma and homophobia compounds the situation still further.

In this time of economic decline, health departments and their communities are bending under the weight of these public health crises. NASTAD and NCSD call on policy makers across the U.S. to provide leadership to stop the unnecessary spread of HIV and STDs by ensuring all gay men have access to preventive services, know their status and, when positive, are linked to quality care and treatment.

Founded in 1992, NASTAD is a nonprofit national association of state and territorial health department HIV/AIDS program directors who have programmatic responsibility for administering HIV/AIDS and viral hepatitis health care, prevention, education, and supportive services programs funded by state and federal governments. For more information, visit www.NASTAD.org.

Founded in 1996, NCSD is a nonprofit national association of state, territorial and local health department STD program directors who have programmatic responsibility for administering STD prevention and control programs funded by state and federal governments. For more information, visit www.NCSDDC.org.

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