



POSITIVE WOMEN'S NETWORK
USA



Sisters With Solutions: 3 Leading National Groups Unite to Address HIV among Women

In honor of National Women & Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, U.S. Positive Women's Network, National Women & AIDS Collective, and the National Black Women's HIV/AIDS Network Launch Working Group on Women, HIV and Health Care Reform

Tuesday, March 10 - In an unprecedented move, three U.S. groups addressing HIV among women have launched a Working Group on Women, HIV and Health Care Reform to develop more effective models for HIV prevention and care. The launch commemorates National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, a day of action that raises awareness on the increasing impact of HIV/AIDS on women and girls.

Recent numbers from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) show that women continue to represent over one-quarter of HIV cases in the United States. Yet HIV-positive women and women-focused HIV organizations feel that many programs and policies were not designed to reflect the current realities of women's lives, particularly as HIV has shifted over the years from a death sentence to a chronic manageable condition. People with HIV who have access to appropriate treatment and care now enjoy normal life expectancy, and women often stay in the workforce and have children.

"Our national political leadership is in the process of implementing a bold plan that will profoundly change many of the policies which have served as barriers to accessing health care and other services in this country," said Vanessa Johnson, of the National Black Women's HIV/AIDS Network (NBWHAN). "HIV-positive women and HIV organizations by, for and about women must be present in local, state and national decision-making - so that policies are grounded in reality."

Advocates point out that many aspects of HIV prevention, testing and care systems do not meet women's needs. "The HIV epidemic among women is driven less by behavior than social, economic and ecological vulnerability," said Naina Khanna of the U.S. Positive Women's Network. "Women living with poverty are far more likely to test positive for HIV and to experience poor health outcomes once diagnosed. Yet HIV prevention and testing efforts continue to focus on people changing their behavior, rather than lifting people out of poverty. We need to rethink our models."

According to Rona Taylor of the National Women and AIDS Collective, "We need to bring a gender lens to the work being done around the reauthorization of Ryan White

funding. Many women rely on non-medical benefits to get themselves and their dependents to and from medical appointments."

The Ryan White Treatment Modernization Act is the major national funding stream for HIV/ AIDS services in the United States and is slated to sunset in September 2009. According to one study, over three-quarters of women living with HIV have at least one child under 18 in their homes. Advocates for women suggest that policies shaping care and support programs must take into account the needs of dependent children and HIV-affected families.

The Working Group will assess Ryan White and other major systems of HIV service delivery to make recommendations for a National AIDS Strategy and Health Care Reform. "We are here as a resource to the Office of National AIDS Policy and the CDC to ensure that programs and policies really work for the individuals they intend to serve," said Vanessa Johnson.

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