



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**In honor of National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day:
HIV+ women and allies respond to threatened future of services
for women across the U.S.**

***Medicalization of HIV and the economic crisis may have negative consequences for
HIV+ women and the programs that serve them***

March 10, 2011- SEATTLE, WA — A recent decision by the WA State Department of Health to eliminate all funding to the only women-specific support program for HIV-positive women in Washington State may be part of a larger national trend to defund women-centered services, say advocates. This decision, combined with a 2010 funding cut from County, will result in a 75% program budget cut to BABES Network-YWCA, the only women-specific education and support AIDS organization in Washington State.

“BABES serves 400 women and affected family members every year,” says Pat Migliore, an HIV-positive Seattle resident and BABES co-founder. “This will have a huge consequence for the health of women we are desperately seeking to keep in care.”

The Department of Health says it will use the resources to hold 20 spaces for women in the state-administered AIDS Drugs Assistance Program (ADAP), if an ADAP waiting list is put in place. But these services are not interchangeable, say advocates.

Nationally, severe racial, gender, and economic disparities persist in the HIV epidemic. The majority of women testing positive for HIV are Black and Latina. Over 64% of women living with HIV earn less than \$10,000 a year, compared with 41% of HIV-positive men. And data continues to show that women suffer worse health outcomes from HIV than do men.

President Obama’s National HIV/AIDS Strategy, released in July 2010, emphasized the importance of improving access to care and health outcomes for people living with HIV. Providers say this goal cannot be accomplished for women without psychosocial support services.

“Supportive services for women are not negotiable – emotional and practical support are necessary for HIV-positive women to stay in care,” says Liz Brosnan, Executive Director of Christie’s Place, a women-serving HIV organization in San Diego, CA, and Vice-Chair for the National Women and AIDS

Collective. “In addition to barriers to health care overall, women living with HIV face high levels of stigma, violence, and have multiple family responsibilities that they prioritize over their own health.”

Advocates fear this may be the beginning of a trend towards eliminating wrap-around services for women and families affected by HIV to pay for primary care and HIV medications. The Women’s Lighthouse Project, a Denver-CO-based women-serving HIV organization, closed its doors in November 2010.

“As funding gets tighter in this new economic climate, we must make sure women’s unique needs don’t fall through the cracks,” says Cynthia Carey-Grant, Executive Director of Women Organized to Respond to Life-threatening Disease (WORLD), an Oakland, CA-based organization that has been serving HIV-positive women since 1991. “Achieving President Obama’s ambitious goals will require sustained investment in community-based, gender-responsive programs.”

The U.S. Positive Women’s Network, a national membership body of HIV-positive women working to achieve HIV policies that are gender-sensitive and grounded in human rights, released a gender analysis of the National HIV/AIDS Strategy last year and will continue to monitor the impact of healthcare reform implementation and other trends affecting women living with HIV. This analysis and other resources are available at www.pwn-usa.org.

BABES, Christie’s Place, and WORLD urge other women-focused programs to contact us if they are witnessing similar trends in their areas.

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BABES Network-YWCA is a Seattle, WA-based peer support program for women living with HIV; a sisterhood of women facing HIV together. Working from the belief that HIV positive women are uniquely qualified to support and encourage one another, BABES’ HIV positive staff women has been providing peer counseling, education, advocacy and outreach to other women living with HIV and their families since 1989. For more information, visit www.babesnetwork.org.

Christie’s Place is San Diego, CA-based leading nonprofit organization providing education, comprehensive social services, advocacy and basic needs assistance to women, children, and families whose lives have been impacted by HIV/AIDS since 1996. Clients can access a substantial range of services provided by expert staff and a network of collaborative partners that empower women and families to help themselves and each other. For more information, visit www.christiesplace.org.

Women Organized to Respond to Life-threatening Disease (WORLD) is an Oakland, CA-based organization that connects HIV-positive women, their families, allies, and communities to one another through peer-based education, support, advocacy, and leadership development. Founded in 1991, WORLD is the home base of the nationally-renowned Lotus Peer Education training program and the U.S. Positive Women’s Network. For more information, visit www.womenhiv.org.