
Presidential Advisory Council on
HIV/AIDS



PACHA Syringe Exchange Letter to President Obama

May 17, 2012

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

Dear Mr. President,

As members of the Presidential Advisory Committee on HIV/AIDS, we would like to thank you for your previous support for use of federal funds for syringe services programs (SSPs), and we request your continued leadership on behalf of the critical role that SSPs play in achieving the goals of the National HIV/AIDS Strategy (Strategy).

As stated in the Strategy, "...studies show that comprehensive prevention and drug treatment programs, including needle exchange, have dramatically cut the number of new HIV infections among people who inject drugs by 80 percent since the mid-1990s." The Strategy additionally states that access to sterile needles and syringes is one of five "...scientifically-proven biomedical and behavioral approaches that reduce the probability of HIV transmission..." and further states that "...several studies have found that providing sterilized equipment to injection drug users substantially reduces risk of HIV infection, increases the probability that they will initiate drug treatment, and does not increase drug use."

In December 2009, you signed into law the Consolidated Appropriations Act 2010, ending a two-decade ban on federal funding for syringe exchange programs contained in the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations bills. This policy allowed local jurisdictions to invest federal funds for syringe exchange as a component of comprehensive HIV/AIDS and viral hepatitis prevention services and substance abuse treatment and recovery programs. Unfortunately, Congress imposed a complete ban on use of federal funds for SSPs for FY 2012. This reversal represents a major setback in achieving the goals of the Strategy at a pivotal time in the course of the epidemic. The funding restriction also diminishes our credibility and leadership on HIV/AIDS globally and our advocacy efforts to support effective, evidence-based strategies to combat the HIV/AIDS epidemic internationally.

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Ending the ban on the use of federal funds for syringe services programs remains an urgent priority for the public health, HIV/AIDS, viral hepatitis, and harm reduction communities. Sustaining and expanding access to sterile syringes and comprehensive services for people who inject drugs is of vital importance to disease control efforts, as state and local jurisdictions struggle to adequately resource these programs as they confront new challenges and growing demand. We are extremely concerned that the FY 2012 federal funding ban may worsen access to HIV testing and prevention interventions for this key risk group, exacerbate HIV-related racial and ethnic health disparities among injection drug users, and jeopardize our ability to meet the goals of the Strategy.

We support your FY 2013 budget language that would allow for the use of federal funds to support SSPs:

“SEC. 505. None of the funds contained in this Act may be used to distribute any needle or syringe for the purpose of preventing the spread of blood borne pathogens in any location that has been determined by the local public health or local law enforcement authorities to be inappropriate for such distribution.”

This language is consistent with our longstanding position on this issue and is further amplified by a recent statement made to the PACHA reiterating strong community support for evidence-based efforts.

We encourage the Administration to continue its support for this language, to prioritize restoring local flexibility in funding syringe services programs during negotiations around the FY 2013 Appropriations bills, and to clearly convey this priority to Congress.

Again we thank you for maintaining your Administration’s focus on syringe services programs.

Respectfully yours,



Nancy Mahon, Chair
Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS