



Policy Statement: Strategic Community Engagement to End the HIV and Hepatitis Epidemics

On behalf of state and territorial health department staff responsible for HIV and viral hepatitis programs, the National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors (NASTAD) calls upon health departments to reimagine, redesign, and implement enhanced community engagement strategies to accelerate progress towards the goals of the [National HIV/AIDS Strategy](#) (NHAS) and the [Action Plan for the Prevention, Care and Treatment of Viral Hepatitis](#).

Data of new HIV and hepatitis C (HCV) infections, persistent and emerging health disparities and substandard outcomes for vulnerable populations in the U.S. clearly demonstrate an urgent need to reinvigorate our prevention and care responses. Strategic and meaningful alliances between communities, medical providers and public health are critical to accomplish goals of reducing HIV and viral hepatitis in the nation. While the reduction of HIV and hepatitis incidence is central to our mission, we are also keenly aware that reducing disease burden is not our only goal. Addressing a range of pressing social challenges that impact the well-being of vulnerable individuals and communities are essential to improving population health as a whole.

Health departments and communities also recognize that even our best tools are anemic if we are not listening, building consensus, identifying and working toward shared goals of ultimately reaching individuals and catering to their holistic health needs.

Robust community engagement requires us to consider and implement strategies that promote iterative opportunities to listen to and dialogue with communities. Further, community engagement extends beyond our traditional grant-required planning processes. Meaningful community engagement must occur regularly, consult a range of impacted stakeholders, occur in a variety of venues and formats, accommodate the needs and preferences of community members, stretch our understanding and conventional wisdom and ideas about communities and occasionally make us uncomfortable. These key elements are integral in the innovation needed in our overarching goal of moving the needle toward a healthier and more just society and ending the HIV and viral hepatitis epidemics.

NASTAD and health departments are committed to implement innovative, accessible programs that meet community needs. NASTAD and its members, as public health leaders, pledge to:

- Gain support for health department programs through ongoing, mutually-beneficial relationships with communities
- Promote promising practices related to community engagement around HIV and viral hepatitis
- Expand stakeholder relationships beyond disease silos, across health departments, academia, community advocacy groups, community-based organizations and national coalitions to promote innovative community engagement
- Perform assessments and share evaluations that justify the investment of federal and state resources for community engagement activities

A future where the vision and goals of the NHAS and *Action Plan for the Prevention, Care and Treatment of Viral Hepatitis* are realized is within reach. Meaningful community engagement is essential to design and implement strategic approaches that will be responsive, effective and sustainable. NASTAD will continue to advocate at the national level to raise awareness of the necessity of innovative strategies and will support states in this endeavor through ongoing peer dialogue and accountability. Unified public health and community responses across jurisdictions must be in place to work towards the social and systems transformation required to end both the HIV and viral hepatitis epidemics.