CALL TO ACTION: Bridging the Gap for Quality Health Services for Gay, Bisexual and MSM

In 2010, NASTAD released a call to action which highlighted the impact of HIV and STD infections on gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (GBM) of all races and ethnicities in the United States. Since then, great progress has been made, particularly in the field of biomedical prevention and access to healthcare. With access to pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), and the knowledge of treatment as prevention, new infections within the U.S. are declining. The global campaign for U=U (Undetectable=Untransmittable), that those living with HIV and have sustained undetectable viral loads cannot sexually transmit the virus, continues to be a call for ending stigma for those living with HIV, and ensuring all have access to antiretroviral therapy. The Affordable Care Act, as well, has led to an increase in health insurance coverage for those living with HIV, alongside existing Ryan White HIV/AIDS Programs.

While great progress has been made, this progress is not equal for everyone. Severe inequity, including persistent structural barriers to prevention and care still exist among many GBM of color. As of 2014, an estimated 615,400 GBM are living with HIV. NASTAD, on behalf of governmental public health leaders responsible for administering HIV and hepatitis programs nationwide, commits this call to action to re-focus our efforts in preventing new infections among GBM of all races, and ensuring all people living with HIV have access to respectful, competent care and treatment.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in 2016, 39,782 people received an HIV diagnosis. Sixty-eight percent (26,200) of all people receiving an HIV diagnosis were GBM. Black MSM (men who have sex with men) accounted for 39% of that figure, followed by Hispanic/Latinx MSM with 28%. Since 2010, diagnoses among white GBM decreased 10%. Among all Black MSM, diagnoses increased 4%, yet diagnosis among young Black MSM (aged 13 to 24) remained relatively level. Among Hispanic/Latinx MSM, diagnoses increased 14%. Progress for some has not lead to progress for all.

As of 2014, an estimated 20% of African American gay and bisexual men living with HIV were unaware of their status. That percentage has declined since 2010, when 24% were unaware of their infection. We have the tools needed to reduce HIV transmission and provide needed healthcare support to GBM. Yet, continued stigma and discrimination, racism, and homophobia—external and internalized—prevent men from being able to access the services they need. Our members, with support from NASTAD and other partners, commit to:

- Engage communities, rather than target them. The most affected by the HIV epidemic must be involved in the development of sound and holistic policies that impact the lives of GBM, acknowledging the different issues facing men of color;
- Recognize that the community is not merely the MSM acronym and that our language must be inclusive of the people we are working to serve;
- Collect data on the effect of the epidemic and response from health departments in support of access to the HIV continuum of care, treatment, and prevention for GBM;
- Ensure quality care is provided to GBM in an environment free from stigma and discrimination;
- Create environments ranging from providers to the highest levels of health department administrations that are free from stigma and discrimination and integrate principles of health equity into all areas;
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- Provide spaces for regular opportunities to educate health department staff and partners on the intersectionality of socioeconomic status, racism, drug use, immigration status, and other barriers that prevent full access to prevention, treatment and care for GBM; and
- Collaborate nationally with partners to ensure best practices are shared to reach GBM as efficiently as possible.

Progress is rarely linear and with movements forward, there can often be steps back. While great strides have been made in the response to HIV for GBM, more focused work is required. NASTAD members continue to commit their efforts to support GBM, ensure their voices are heard throughout the process, and together, work towards the goal of ending the HIV epidemic for all.