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HIV Advisory Body

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Johanne Morne, Director
New York State Department of Health AIDS Institute
Empire State Plaza, Corning Tower
Albany, NY 12237

Dear Ms. Morne:

The New York State HIV Advisory Body (HAB) writes this letter in support of the AIDS Institute's recent efforts to make the Transgender, Gender Non-Conforming, and Gender Non-Binary (TGNCNB) community a key population to be addressed within HIV prevention and treatment services.

HAB commends the AIDS Institute for its longstanding commitment, inclusion and support for TGNCNB community led initiatives and programs across NYS. HAB members were pleased to learn of current and on-going initiatives to:

- Recommend improving language and establishing stigma-free, supportive, service delivery environments (Anti-Stigma Recommendations January 2018) in the letter sent to AI-funded providers in January 2018.
- Provide funding for TGNCNB-inclusive comprehensive sexual health education that is age-appropriate and medically accurate, including information on nPEP and PrEP, TGNCNB history and literature into existing curricula to reduce feelings of isolation for TGNCNB youth, and reduce social stigma.
- Amend jurisdictional regulations to permit competent minors to consent for all STI/HIV sexual health testing, treatment and preventative medical care, including PrEP and nPEP.
- Fund Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs), and TGNCNB/Gender Creative/Gender Expansive support service within school districts for youth and parents.
- Support tailored prevention strategies for TGNCNB individuals.
- Expand gender options, chart notations for documenting information relevant to TGNCNB patients on registration forms and in AIRS to improve data collection efforts and engagement.
- Develop peer-to-peer training with TGNCNB folks overseeing the design and evaluation including methods to create feedback loop (including observing the trainer and providing feedback, QA processes, etc.).
- Create and promote safe space that offer sexual health for free or low cost regardless of immigration status and insurance and literature that is tailored to immigrants in their native language as well as their gender identity.

- Increase opportunities for employment of consultants and staff of trans-experience within the Institute.
- Host the PrEP for Transgender Women Forum on April 10, 2018
- Support the first ever TGNCNB Leadership Collective in NYS to foster the development of established and emerging community leaders.

Despite these gains, TGNCNB individuals continue to experience challenges when seeking HIV prevention and treatment services within New York State. The lack of qualified medical providers makes navigating the health system a frustrating task for the community. TGNCNB individuals living outside New York City face even larger struggles in their rural communities.

Overall people of trans-experience live guarded lives and seeking care is a vulnerable experience. Every interaction with a service provider has the potential to expose TGNCNB individuals to bias, discrimination and even violence. When a provider is unable or unwilling to provide care, a patient can feel ashamed, embarrassed, hurt, angry, etc. It is important for providers and those working in the field to be sensitive to the realities of the TGNCNB community, inclusive of persons of color, and how they impact health seeking behavior.

HAB recognizes and supports the following recommendations to further address fundamental issues in serving the TGNCNB community:

Addressing Stigma and Internalized Biases

HAB has reviewed the [Measuring and Addressing Stigma in Healthcare Settings Guidance](#), [Measuring Stigma in Healthcare Setting NYS Survey](#), and the [Initial Survey Findings](#) documents as part of our meetings. We find that these survey's may be a great way for AI-funded providers to assess program staff bias toward patients of trans-experience and identify specific patient, provider, and system-level barriers and facilitators to health care access. HAB recommends that this survey (or an adapted survey) can be utilized as part of a Quality Improvement project or work plan deliverable for all AI-funded contracts to foster the implementation of strategies to improve delivery of care in their space.

Training for providers

A lack of cultural sensitivity+ among medical and support service providers about the TGNCNB community negatively impacts their ability to serve consumers appropriately. As a result, health care providers are less likely to offer services such as HIV, STD, Hepatitis C (HCV), PEP and PrEP screening to people of Trans-experience in New York State.

TGNCNB individuals need access to physical, sexual, mental, and behavioral healthcare that is regionally accessible, affordable, and delivered by staff that are both skilled and able to provide trans-specific care that is culturally responsive, affirming and inclusive. It is critical that steps be taken to ensure that AI-funded providers have access and information to better serve our TGNCNB community members. One recommendation is to develop/share a list of trainings and

resources available to AI-funded organizations to build their capacity to provide culturally responsive, sensitive and safe spaces for care and services.

Additionally, HAB supports the recommendations from the TGNCNB ETE Advisory Workgroup to create a focused and strategic TGNCNB led training, education, and evaluation program for healthcare providers to assess: (1) provider knowledge and attitudes towards TGNCNB patients, (2) TGNCNB service satisfaction, (3) TGNCNB welcoming physical environments, and 4) clinic-level TGNCNB care to enhance understanding of the range of sexual behaviors and identities of trans men and trans women and gender non-conforming/non-binary communities that both increase risk for HIV and other STIs, but also to provide comprehensive sexual health care.

PreP/PEP Access/Outreach Campaigns

PrEP messaging is rarely discussed in individual sessions with a doctor, enough time is not offered to address concerns or to ask questions that are important when exploring prevention strategies. It is often a quick reference that is not supported by a comprehensive overview or assessment.

PrEP/PEP education should be provided on both an individual and group level. HAB recommends funding group discussions to open the door for further communication and assessment of need. Group discussions establish a safe and open space for the TGNCNB community to share their experiences can both increase uptake and support adherence for PrEP and improved utilization of PEP.

PrEP messaging is seldom part of the services advertised for people of trans-experience. HAB recommends the creation of a targeted outreach campaign featuring individuals of trans-experience with messaging focused on sexual behaviors rather than labeling identities would aid in promoting information and education on PrEP.

Employment Opportunities

Poverty and its associated harms disproportionately affect transgender New Yorkers. Addressing poverty through job creation for transgender people in sustainable, will improve the livelihoods of transgender people and will reduce negative health consequences such as HIV and other STDs, suicide, and homelessness. HAB supports the advisory group recommendations to increase access to opportunities for employment, including related education and employment/workforce/vocational services for transgender and gender nonconforming people.

Programs would 1) deliver economic services, including job readiness services and employment workshops; 2) work with the public and private sectors to improve the livelihood opportunities of transgender community members; 3) incorporate a peer care coordination/navigation model,

where coordinators/navigators will facilitate community access to these services; and 4) develop unique support components that emphasize TGNC mentoring and leadership development.

Addressing Violence with Law Enforcement

For people of trans-experience who engage in survival sex work, recent legislation that makes websites responsible for sex work activities has forced individuals to return to engaging in unsafe practices. Without the vetting and filtering that online platforms provide, helping keep trans-identifying people safer than in the past, many TGNCNB individuals engaging in sex work are being forced back onto the street, where things are much more dangerous. Among the chief risks faced by trans-identified sex workers is experiencing targeting, harassment, and too often violence from law enforcement. This includes the unequal treatment from law enforcement officers who target TGNCNB people even when other groups also engage in sex work, thus perpetuating the cycle of maintaining TGNCNB people vulnerable and trapped in the system.

The HAB supports the TGNCNB ETE Workgroup recommendations to develop a peer-to-peer training led by TGNCNB people that will work with medical providers, law enforcement, counselors, governmental agencies, funders, etc., to conduct trainings on how to actively engage the TGNCNB community.

We thank you for your support and prioritizing the needs of the TGNCNB community. As an advisory body our mission will remain to advocate for the inclusion of all persons including those of trans-experience to partner with the AIDS Institute, ensuring that all communities benefit from ending the epidemic goals.

Sincerely

Vaughn Taylor-Akutagawa
Community Co-Chair

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