HIV, Hep C Advocates Urge Congress to Lift Syringe Funding Ban

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On National HIV Testing Day (NHTD), June 27, more than 140 local, national and international harm-reduction advocates put out a letter that calls on the U.S. Congress to end the federal funding ban on syringe service programs (SSPs), reports the Drug Policy Alliance, which wrote the petition.

The letter is calling on Senators Barbara Mikulski (D–Md.) and Tom Harkin (D–Iowa) as well as Congressmen Hal Rogers (R–Ky.) and Jack Kingston (R–Ga.) to make SSPs an essential component of the public health approach to the emerging heroin epidemic. Advocates argue that the programs not only help connect users to overdose prevention, drug treatment and health care, but also provide them with vital tools for preventing blood-borne diseases such as HIV and the hepatitis C virus (HCV).

The ban was originally put in place in 1988, repealed in 2009 and reinstated by Congress in 2011. Since then, studies have come out showing that SSPs do not increase drug use and have the potential to reduce national AIDS cases among injection drug users by nearly 80 percent.

The petition to lift the ban was signed by harm-reduction advocates in 26 states, as well as Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia and dozens of international organizations. Signatories included the American Psychological Association (APA), the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the Human Rights Campaign.

To read the full letter, click here.

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