

The Post-Standard

Post-Standard Letter to the Editor

Fighting AIDS

Increase funding for Ryan White Act to help victims

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It is hard to believe that it has been nearly a quarter century since HIV/AIDS punctuated the national landscape.

Those of us who can remember the first reporting of a strange cancer spreading across the metropolitan gay communities, certainly thought we were immune, removed, safe from the fatal reality this disease would bring to this group of unfortunate men.

How safe do we feel now? How removed? How immune? Nearly 25 years later, most of us know at least one person who is living with HIV, or has died from AIDS.

A friend, family member, someone at work - somehow HIV/AIDS has directly or indirectly impacted all of our lives. Have we done enough? Have we showed compassion? Or, has it just gotten easier for us to accept the ongoing presence of HIV/AIDS in our lives?

According to recent estimates from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO), we continue to see up to 5 million new infections each year globally, with 45,000 infections each year in the U.S. and its territories - amounting to approximately 8,000 new HIV infections each day.

Current estimates remind us that 40 million people are living with HIV/AIDS worldwide, with now over 1 million people struggling with HIV/AIDS in our own country.

Over 3 million people died of AIDS in 2004, bringing the global total to 20 million deaths. We have lost over a half million U.S. citizens to AIDS since the first reported case.

Bringing the statistics a bit closer to home helps us understand we are not immune in Central New York. The 11-county region of the Central New York HIV

CARE Network is home to approximately 3,000 persons living with HIV or AIDS. Further, Onondaga County claims nearly 800 residents in this struggle.

We are at a crossroad in our national response to HIV/AIDS. Just a few weeks ago, on Sept. 30, The Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency (CARE) Act expired. The CARE Act, through it "titles" (funding streams), is our nation's financial response to the AIDS epidemic for citizens infected with HIV or living with AIDS.

The intention of The Ryan White CARE Act is to provide life saving and sustaining services to persons living with HIV/AIDS who are uninsured or under-insured. During its original authorization in 1990, federal officials developed guidelines for Ryan White monies to be reauthorized every five years.

Programs and services continue to be funded by Congress during this period, but we are at a critical time in the process. Ryan White dollars have been flat funded for the last two reauthorizations, but through treatment advances, infected persons are living longer and requiring care at greater levels.

In the coming weeks, our neighbors in the Central New York Community will be given an opportunity to join in this fight. As a representative of the Central New York HIV CARE Network and a provider of service to the HIV Community, I invite you to attend a Public Forum on the Importance of Ryan White Reauthorization in Central New York. The Forum will be held at Syracuse University's College of Law - Grant Auditorium, on Nov. 1 from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Additional information for the Public Forum and Ryan White CARE Act can be obtained by calling the Central New York HIV CARE Network at 315-472-8099 or by visiting www.endaidsnow.org