

The Satcher Health Leadership Institute



August 18, 2011

Dear Congressperson:

I am writing to share with you both good and bad news relative to the AIDS epidemic in America and the pandemic around the world. In this year of the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of AIDS, there is indeed good news. Perhaps the best news is that we now know that by aggressively treating patients who are infected with the AIDS virus and treating them early, we can reduce the spread of HIV by more than 95 percent. So clearly, we now have the tools to be able to say that, "Treatment is Prevention."

However, in the midst of this good news, as we move aggressively to diagnose more people who are carrying the AIDS virus and to get them on treatment, we are facing a crisis in the AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP), a program which is jointly funded by the federal government and the states. In Georgia alone, there are almost 2,000 HIV/AIDS infected persons who are on the waiting list for treatment through ADAP. These are people who have no other source of treatment in most cases. Nationally, there are approximately 15,000 persons who are on the waiting list for ADAP.

In addition to the sad fact that many people are going without treatment, and certainly early treatment of their disease, there is the other fact that people who are treated early actually are receiving the most cost-effective intervention. Hospitalizing a person who is in the late stages of AIDS can cost up to \$100,000 or more for one hospitalization. In addition to being cost-effective, early treatment of people with the AIDS virus also prevents the spreading of the disease.

So I call on you today, in the midst of very challenging economic times, to consider the challenge which we face — first, to be humane in our response to this disease and the people who have been infected with the virus; secondly, to take the most cost-effective approach to intervention, thereby intervening early; and thirdly, to recognize, as both the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have determined, that today treatment is indeed prevention. So our priority should be prevention in dealing with this epidemic. Now we know that by prioritizing treatment, we are maximizing the prevention of the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "David Satcher".

David Satcher, MD, PhD  
Director, The Satcher Health Leadership Institute  
at Morehouse School of Medicine  
16<sup>th</sup> Surgeon General of the United States