

Obama to announce new steps to combat AIDS

December 1 2011, By JULIE PACE , Associated Press

(AP) -- President Barack Obama is renewing the U.S. commitment to ending AIDS Thursday, setting new goals for getting more people access to life-saving drugs and boosting spending on treatment in the U.S. by \$50 million dollars.

Obama planned to announce the new initiatives at an event in Washington marking World AIDS Day. Former Presidents George W. Bush and Bill Clinton also were speaking at the event via satellite.

Senior Obama [administration officials](#) said the president will set a goal of getting [antiretroviral drugs](#) to 2 million more people around the world by the end of 2013. In addition, the U.S. will aim to get the drugs to 1.5 million HIV-positive pregnant women to prevent them from passing the virus to their children.

The new global goals build on the work of the President's [Emergency Plan](#) for AIDS Relief, which focuses on prevention, treatment and support programs in 15 countries hard-hit by the AIDS pandemic, 12 of them in Africa. Bush launched the \$15 billion plan in 2003, and in 2008, Congress tripled the budget to \$48 billion over five years.

Despite Obama's more ambitious goals, the relief program's budget is not expected to increase. Instead officials said the expanded targets would be funded through savings achieved by making the program more efficient and cutting the costs of treatment.

Obama is also announcing new initiatives to combat HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, in the U.S. Officials said he would direct the Department of Health and Human Services to increase funding for domestic treatment by \$50 million. The White House said there are 1.2 million Americans living with HIV, and 50,000 new infections each year.

The bulk of the new funding - \$35 million - will go to state programs that help people living with HIV and AIDS get access to medicine. There are currently more than 6,500 Americans living with the virus on waiting lists for medication, according to the White House.

The rest of the domestic funds will go to HIV [medical clinics](#) across the country, with an emphasis on areas where HIV infections have increased and care and treatment are not readily available. Officials said the additional clinic funding would give 7,500 more patients access to treatment.

The \$50 million is already part of the HHS budget, and officials said Obama does not need congressional approval to reallocate the funds. The officials requested anonymity in order to speak ahead of the president's official announcement.

The HIV virus has infected an estimated 60 million people worldwide since the deadly pandemic began 30 years ago. More than 33 million people are currently living with the virus.

While the failure to find an effective HIV vaccine continues to frustrate the medical community, experts say new scientific research in recent years has led to substantial progress in preventing and treating the virus.

Obama ordered his staff to reevaluate both their international and domestic approaches to HIV and AIDS this summer after being briefed on the scientific advancements.

Officials from both parties praised the new initiatives, and commended Democratic and Republican leaders for coming together for the announcement.

"Here's what we can do when we work together. We've got leaders of both political parties standing behind something that works," said Gayle Smith, Obama's senior director for development and democracy at the National Security Council.

Tony Fratto, a former Bush spokesman, urged both parties to avoid making the fight against AIDS a political issue.

"The only way to undermine this historic undertaking is if it becomes a partisan issue," he said. "The reasons a [Barack Obama](#) and a George W. Bush can support America's leading role in addressing this disease may be very different, but what's important is they've sought the same goal."

Other goals Obama will announce Thursday include:

- Funding 4.7 million voluntary medical male circumcisions in eastern and southern Africa over the next two years. Research shows circumcisions reduce the risk of female-to-male HIV transmission by more than 60 percent.
- Distributing more than 1 billion condoms in the developing world in the next two years.
- Urging other world leaders to join U.S. in boosting efforts to eradicate HIV/[AIDS](#).

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