

Health groups urge Congress not to allow AIDS fight to wane

November 29 2017, by Richard Lardner

A coalition of nearly 40 advocacy groups said Wednesday they're concerned about the Trump administration's commitment to the global fight against AIDS so they're urging senior members of Congress to make sure money for key prevention programs isn't cut back.

The groups wrote in a letter sent to Wednesday to congressional leaders that they have "profound concern" about the direction the Trump administration appears to be taking in the response to AIDS.

"We are writing to sound the alarm," said the letter, delivered just ahead of World AIDS Day on Friday.

In a news release accompanying the letter, the groups said the Trump administration had called for an \$800 million cut in the 2018 budget from efforts to combat HIV and AIDS. Those proposed cuts led the State Department to develop a new strategy for a program known as the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, or PEPFAR.

While the groups credited Congress for moving to dismiss the administration's proposed reductions, they said they are still worried about the trajectory of PEPFAR and other programs to combat the disease. The 2018 government budget isn't law yet, however.

"By focusing on achieving control of the epidemic in 13 'priority' countries, while only maintaining life-saving treatment in other countries, this strategy runs the risk of forfeiting gains in some of the

highest burden countries in the world," according to the letter.

The [advocacy groups](#) warned that there will be millions more AIDS-related deaths and HIV infections in sub-Saharan Africa over the next 15 years if Congress doesn't head off the proposed [budget cuts](#).

"At a moment when we're finally getting ahead of the disease and its impact on communities, a reduction in funding like the administration proposed - and implementation of PEPFAR's new strategy, which aligns with those budget cuts - would directly result in cuts to the number of people accessing HIV prevention, care, and treatment, and likely trigger a resurgence of the global epidemic."

The letter was sent to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York, House Speaker Paul Ryan of Wisconsin and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi of California.

One of the groups that signed the [letter](#), The ONE Campaign, also issued a report Wednesday that said for the first time in 15 years the United States is "showing signs of retreat" from the campaign against HIV and AIDS.

"The Trump administration appears ready to unilaterally trade the iconic red ribbon for a white flag of surrender in the global fight against AIDS," according to the report.

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