COVID-19 and People Living with HIV/AIDS:
The Critical Role of the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program
COVID-19 Response Funding Request: $500 Million
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The Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program is helping people living with HIV maintain access to care and treatment during this unprecedented public health crisis. More than 60 percent of individuals served by the Ryan White Program live below the federal poverty line and more than 70% are either African American or Hispanic/Latino. The program effectively supports individuals with complex health, psychosocial, and socioeconomic needs with staying healthy as evidenced by an average viral suppression rate of 87.1% among Ryan White Program clients.

COVID-19 and the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program

The COVID-19 pandemic has left Ryan White Program clients and other low-income people with HIV even more medically and economically vulnerable. The $90 million included in the CARES Act, H. R. 748, was an important first step in helping programs funded by the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program begin to address the immediate needs of their patients.

As the impacts of the pandemic spread and accelerate throughout the country, additional funding for the Ryan White Program is needed across all of the program’s parts to help people with HIV stay in care and on treatment; help maintain access to care and treatment during the economic down turn; meet the needs of people who now are without health insurance; and help prevent and contain the spread of COVID-19. In addition, state Ryan White Programs anticipate losing significant resources due to reduced contributions from their state budgets.

During the last recession, the Ryan White Program was a critical safety net for individuals who lost employer-sponsored insurance and had no other source of care, spurring waiting lists for AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP) services and delays in care. Investment in this program is critical to ensure that no person living with HIV loses access to services during the COVID-19 pandemic and in the economic aftermath.

In order to meet these immediate needs, Congress should allocate $500 million in requested relief to be divided amongst all parts of the Ryan White Program.

Urgent Needs

Programs and clinics funded by the Ryan White Program report the following urgent needs:

- Access to Ryan White Program services, including health care and medications, for the newly unemployed and uninsured
- Payment of premiums for health insurance, along with deductibles and copayments
- Personal protective equipment (PPE) and COVID-19 testing materials and supplies
- Behavioral health services (including overdose prevention and harm reduction services)
- Home delivery of medications for patients
- Mobile phones or other phone service and internet service to support patient access to telehealth
- Medical equipment suitable for telehealth visits, such as tele-stethoscopes
- Food and housing for patients
- Safe transportation for patients
- Additional case management services
- Temporary shelter for patients who need to quarantine and are not in living situations where that is possible
- COVID-19 workforce training and support for frontline providers, including mental health support for providers who are working in new and often extreme conditions
- Outreach and education on COVID-19 preventative measures and best practices
- COVID-19 therapeutics and vaccines
- Training and education activities for grantees and subrecipients

This resource was compiled by the Federal AIDS Policy Partnership’s AIDS Budget & Appropriations Coalition.