October 2020 – Two years since its launch and one year into the implementation of the federal Ending the HIV Epidemic (EHE) initiative, the ACT NOW: END AIDS (ANEKA) coalition has updated the Executive Summary of its groundbreaking community-driven policy paper: Ending the HIV Epidemic (EtE) in the United States: A Roadmap for Federal Action. As our nation tackles the challenges and uncertainty related to the 2020 elections, COVID-19, and racism as a public health crisis, ANEA reaffirms and reframes our commitment to ending HIV through the kind of disruptive innovation that can only be achieved with the leadership of people living with HIV and the communities most affected by the virus. As we head toward 2021, we call on the next presidential administration to center human rights in our national efforts to address the epidemic and recommit to ending HIV by 2025.

ANEKA launched the first iteration of the Roadmap in December of 2018, calling upon the U.S. government to declare an official goal of ending the domestic HIV epidemic by 2025. Through a process managed by AIDS United and with extensive input from over 350 organizations working on HIV, public health, and reproductive health, the Roadmap outlined a series of critical recommendations to dramatically decrease new transmissions through a human rights-based approach and a distinct emphasis on racial and gender-based justice.

2020 brought with it unforeseen challenges to ending the epidemic and impeded the implementation of the federal Ending the Epidemic initiative across the nation. COVID-19 has ravaged many of the same communities already experiencing higher HIV transmission rates due to structural neglect and inequality. According to Charles King, CEO of Housing Works (a co-chair of ANEA) “While it has been shown that an HIV diagnosis does not put one at more risk for contracting COVID-19, the pandemic has, and may continue to have, an impact on HIV prevention and care for years to come”. Yet, community organizations and health departments have evolved in order to keep crucial services afloat even as they struggle to contain both viruses. The latest updates to the Roadmap outline where the opportunities to sustain innovation lie and how crucial acting now is.

The Black Lives Matter uprisings across the U.S. have simultaneously increased attention to the racial injustice embedded in this nation’s institutions and unified public health advocates and experts around the call, “racism is a public health crisis”. Public health entities across the country have rallied to demand our public institutions (including government, law enforcement, and public health agencies) act now to create real systemic change that fights for Black liberation. The health and well-being of all communities negatively impacted by racism depend on any forthcoming presidential administration’s ability to influence public health advocates and researchers on the role they can play in addressing and calling attention to racial disparities.

Despite these emerging challenges, ANEA believes that the U.S. still has the tools and capability to end the HIV epidemic at home. In the coming months, ANEA and our many participating organizations look forward to working with new and existing governmental allies to ensure that we collectively uphold our commitments to provide all communities with the tools they need to treat and prevent HIV. Learn more and read the full updates to ANEA’s Executive Summary at https://anea.org/the-roadmap.