8.18.2020: For Biden/Harris, A Historic Ticket Demands a Historically Ambitious Plan to End the HIV Epidemic

On August 12, 2020, former Vice President Joe Biden finally announced his running mate, California Senator Kamala Harris. The ACT NOW: END AIDS Coalition (ANEA) has been seeking information about the Biden team’s plans to end the HIV epidemic since 2019. In June of 2020, VP Biden responded to a 20-page HIV questionnaire sent in partnership with AIDS United stating that his plan would rely heavily on updating the Obama administration’s National HIV/AIDS Strategy. While HIV activists remain skeptical of his responses, the latest addition of Sen. Harris, who ran her own presidential candidacy with a promise to end the HIV epidemic nationally and globally, can bring the community one step closer to the creation of a plan to end HIV from the presidential candidate.

ANEA celebrates the historic nomination of a Black woman to the role of Vice President. We additionally applaud Senator Harris’s 2019 PrEP Access and Coverage Act, legislation that would require public and private insurance to cover PrEP and assure people without insurance access to PrEP. However, such legislation must be paired with efforts against racism, sexism, poor health services, and other structural determinants of health that disproportionately impact Black people. The legislation must also address the low use of PrEP among Black communities and women.

A successful end to the epidemic will center women, transgender communities, gay and bisexual men, unapologetically Black and Latinx leadership, people of color, people living with HIV, and drug-user health in its response. ANEA invites the Vice President and Senator to hear directly from these communities during a meeting between the coalition, VP, Senator, and other relevant campaign staffers. The ambitious EHE targets will remain close but cannot be achieved without a meaningful commitment to these communities disproportionately impacted by HIV, racism, low-income, and stigma.

The current administration’s implementation of and advocacy towards policies that are directly at odds with stopping new HIV transmissions and which further comprise the health of people living with or vulnerable to HIV contradict the federal goal of ending HIV by 2030. Biden’s commitment to End the HIV Epidemic is 5 years ahead of Trump’s, in line with the goals of community activists, calling for an end to the domestic epidemic by 2025.

Like Biden, Sen. Harris has vowed to expand access to quality, affordable health care and to increase HIV treatment worldwide through PEPFAR. While these commitments raise optimism, with the evidence-based tools for HIV treatment and prevention at the fingertips of this nation, the conceivable end of the HIV epidemic requires the meaningful engagement of the most vulnerable individuals in America to address the structural and systemic barriers that are the real drivers of the epidemic. We know today that when people with HIV are on effective treatment, they cannot transmit the virus to sexual partners (Undetectable = Untransmittable). By committing more resources to ensure people get the treatment and care they need to stay healthy and no longer transmit HIV, we can get closer to ending the epidemic.

ANEA has reached out to the VP’s team and is hopeful for a meeting with Biden and Harris before the November election.
Disclaimer: The content of this letter does not express the views of all members of the Act Now: End AIDS coalition or our government partners.

5. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2882967/