



**Targeting Resources for Communities of Color Affected
by HIV/AIDS
Community of Color HIV/AIDS Initiative,
New York City, 2001
Adopted from a *ColorLines Magazine* article by Karen Carillo;
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Overview

HIV/AIDS infections have been on the increase in New York City's communities of color since the start of the syndrome's crisis. People of color make up the majority of those living with AIDS in New York City—43 percent Black and 32 percent Latino in mid-2000. Blacks and Latinas make up 90 percent of all new infections among women. Until 2001, however, the vast majority of funding for prevention and educational programs to combat the disease had been focused in Manhattan and directed toward larger organizations that have historically had limited contact with people of color.

The Policy

In 2001, the New York City Council acted to promote HIV/AIDS prevention in communities of color by:

- Levying a \$3.2 million tax levy;
- Securing \$1.8 million in state matching funds; and
- Expanding the pool of grantees to ensure much greater representation by organizations of color.

Impact

Overall funding for HIV/AIDS prevention and education in New York City has more than quadrupled. The 2005 allocation provides \$8.7 million in contracts to 219 local organizations, and only three large grants were made to national organizations and support groups. This is a departure from just the previous year, in which the funding was distributed to fewer than 60 groups. "For the first time, many small groups working in communities where there is the greatest need are finally getting city contracts," says Jennifer Flynn of the AIDS Housing Network.¹ Carnarsie Aware, for example, works in Queens with undocumented immigrants and received a \$50,000 allocation. "The message is changing in these communities, where the issue was never talked about before," reflects Flynn. "People used to have to go to an AIDS organization for information. Now it is becoming more mainstream, and 16-year-olds are getting information and condoms when they go to their local computer center."

HIV/AIDS advocates have also noted a shift in historically white-led gay and lesbian organizations. Flynn notes, "Initially, we faced some opposition because the resources were shifting, and some groups have continued to push for larger sums of funding. But, many of these

¹ Quoted in "Dying for Resources," by Karen Juanita Carrillo, *ColorLines*, Spring 2003. This case study includes material from the article.

groups are now diversifying their staff, leadership, and community served.” Gay Men’s Health Crisis, for example, has recently hired its first Latina Executive Director.

Key Organizations

For a number of years, the National Black Commission on AIDS and the Latino Commission on AIDS have been advocating for parity in HIV/AIDS prevention funding. Housing Works helped reframe the issue in New York City by providing data analysis showing that even though communities of color are most impacted by the HIV/AIDS epidemic, their communities were least likely to receive city resources. The New York City Communities of Color HIV/AIDS Coalition was formed around the campaign and has since grown to over 40 organizations. Key coalition members include the New York AIDS Housing Network, Harm United Health Services and Facilities, NYC AIDS Housing Network, and needle exchange organizations.

Winning the Campaign

In January 2000, the Centers for Disease Control reported that, for the first time since the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, the majority of new HIV/AIDS cases could be found among African American and Latino men. That announcement prompted the National Black Leadership Commission, the Latino Commission on AIDS, and Gay Men of African Descent to come together and declare their communities to be in a state of emergency.

At the time, media reports claimed that white gay men had been able to combat HIV transmissions because they educated themselves about condom use and had begun using prevention measures. Presumably, cultural homophobia and an attendant lack of HIV prevention and treatment services were leading to an increase in HIV infections in communities of color. Community organizations and cultural networks were encouraged to deal with their homophobic issues as a primary means to decrease HIV infections. But one organization, the New York City-based public policy advocacy group Housing Works, used the Centers for Disease Control data and New York state statistics to show how funding disparities were a key factor in the high incidence rates in communities of color.

In January 2001, Housing Works released a report revealing how persons of color made up over 83 percent of new AIDS cases confirmed in 1999, but groups of color received only 35 percent of \$63 million in AIDS Institute funding. “The magnitude of it didn’t hit you until you saw the numbers of people of color against the numbers of whites,” notes Suki Ports of the Family Health Project.

Armed with information, local HIV/AIDS service providers began talking about banding together to find a way to turn back the tide. “There was a paradigm shift,” explains Housing Works director Terri Smith Caronia. “The powers that be always knew it was better to have infighting—if they threw out five dollars and had people of color fighting for it, that would keep us too busy to even think about demanding more. So organizations of color just decided to stop fighting over the crumbs. We organized to get the whole pie.”

Black, Asian, Native American, and Latino organizations that served HIV/AIDS populations came together to form the New York City Communities of Color HIV/AIDS Coalition, which organized an April 2001 summit. Hilda Melore, a dental hygienist by profession and coordinator

with Voices of Women of Color against HIV/AIDS (VOW), recalls, “Council members came to the summit because they were told they’d be given the opportunity to talk before a large, politically active crowd.” However, before they were allowed to speak, they had to tell the summit’s audience of potential voters whether or not they planned to support a proposal to have New York City make grants to support HIV/AIDS-oriented groups of color. Council members in attendance were unanimous in promising to support the idea. To make certain they wouldn’t forget their promises, the coalition members followed up the summit with regular visits to city hall.

Challenges

One challenge during the drafting of the legislation was over language requiring that all groups receiving funding have a staff and board that were at least 51 percent people of color. The initial language was stricken over fears that it might be illegal, even though a number of legal advocates believed that it would hold up in court. “The 51 percent rule was an important way to ensure that funding was directed to communities of color where the HIV/AIDS epidemic has grown,” says Jennifer Flynn. Even though the language was removed, a number of groups receiving the funding agreed to the 51 percent principle.

The September 2001 attacks resulted in many changes to the city’s budget, and the \$5 million allocated for the HIV/AIDS initiative was reduced. However, even with major budget cuts in 2002, New York City’s new mayor and city council granted nearly the same amount of funding. Melore states, “The money was not cut because the rates of incidence are extremely high. We’re not just saying, ‘We want money!’ The rates are there; everything is data-driven.”

Replicability

“Everybody wants to help stem the AIDS epidemic, and the only way is by funding the community-based organizations that are of color,” asserts Hilda Melore. “If rates are high among Black men, we have to fund the agencies that serve Black men.” The HIV/AIDS campaign shows that shifting public debate around equitable resource allocation can be highly effective in generating new resources for communities of color.

In addition, there is great promise for issue crossover where large racial disparities exist, such as health access, education funding, and transportation funding. For example, documenting transit racism in Los Angeles by the Bus Riders Union forced the L.A. Metropolitan Transit Authority to reallocate hundreds of millions of dollars to increase public transportation services in communities of color.