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Bernie Sanders Works to Create an HIV-Free Generation

by Winnie McCroy
EDGE Editor
Monday Mar 14, 2016

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Democratic Presidential hopeful Bernie Sanders released an [issue paper](#) on how to create an HIV/AIDS-Free Generation. His top recommendation in caring for America's 1.2M people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHAs) was to tackle the crisis of affordable drugs.

"It is indefensible that even with insurance and rebates, a person with HIV must spend thousands of dollars per year just on prescription drugs -- often leaving them unable to afford decent housing or other necessities -- all while profiteering companies continue to jack up the price of these treatments overnight, simply because they can," wrote Sanders.

Instead of padding the pockets of drug companies, we must focus on the public health. The richest nation in the world should not leave sick people to fend for themselves, said Sanders. His plan would establish a multibillion-dollar prize fund to incentivize drug development. This prize fund of more than \$3B per year would replace our country's broken system that drives drug prices up through government-sanctioned monopolies.

The Prize Fund would reward medical researchers based on the therapeutic value a new treatment offers, and drugs would have generic competition immediately after FDA approval. He would also negotiate drug prices with pharma companies, and import lower-cost drugs from Canada and other countries. The U.S. is the only major country that does not regulate prescription drug prices. Sanders believes this plan will be much cheaper than the current system.

"In other words, this plan would break the link between drug development and the rewards for medical research and development," said Sanders. "In doing so, we will reward true innovation, eliminate the market incentive for copycat drugs and get all HIV/AIDS treatments to the people who need them at generic prices."

Sanders also said he will increase substance use and mental health services for PLWHAs, and those at-risk populations by expanding community health centers, National Health Service Corps, and substance abuse treatment centers. Sanders will also fight to expand the Ryan White HIV/AIDS program.

Beyond health care, Sanders said he would push for legislation to expand civil rights protections for LGBTs and PLWHAs. This means resources and training for health providers, social services, law enforcement, and all other entities. Schools must provide age-appropriate sex education and scientifically accurate info regarding HIV infection. He would also expand the Housing Opportunities for Persons with HIV/AIDS (HOPWA) program that currently provides funding for housing assistance and related services for tens of thousands of low-income people living with HIV and their families.

Sanders said he would like to double the number of people on HIV treatment worldwide by 2020, expanding The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) to increase access to treatment. He'll also fight against the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which will significantly increase prices of HIV/AIDS drugs by granting new monopoly rights to big pharma companies.

Finally, he will work to increase testing so everyone knows their status, and remove the stigma around HIV.

"But a test is not enough -- providers should work with patients to identify those at risk who may not know they are at high risk, especially women with potentially high-risk partners. Patients should learn about

prophylaxis options or all other appropriate measures, and these visits should be fully covered by health insurance," said Sanders. "We all must work together so we can finally realize the goal of an AIDS-free generation."

Winnie McCroy is the Women on the EDGE Editor, HIV/Health Editor, and Assistant Entertainment Editor for EDGE Media Network, handling all women's news, HIV health stories and theater reviews throughout the U.S. She has contributed to other publications, including The Village Voice, Gay City News, Chelsea Now and The Advocate, and lives in Brooklyn, New York.

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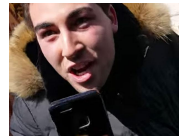
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