

FIGHT HIV WITH AWARENESS

(Note: The following Letter to the Editor was published by the Hattiesburg American on October 29, 2009 and was written by Executive Director, Kathy Garner,).

Dear Editor:

This month, in recognition of National AIDS Awareness Month, we mourn the loss of 565,927 lives due to such a terrible disease and remind all Americans that the domestic AIDS crisis continues. The U.S. is mired in an urgent health care crisis as efforts in funding, prevention, and monitoring of the HIV/AIDS epidemic have failed to effectively curb infection rates, especially in communities of color.

In the South, an African-American woman is 16 times more likely to contract HIV than her white counterpart. In Mississippi, African-Americans account for less than 40 percent of the total population, but constitute almost 70 percent of the new cases diagnosed in our state.

Since 1988, when Congress authorized the president to issue a proclamation observing "National AIDS Awareness and Prevention Month," Americans have joined with the government and AIDS service organizations to pursue appropriate programs and activities to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. However, because people with HIV/AIDS are living longer and fewer people are dying from the disease, public attention to the disease has waned and funding for outreach and education has not kept pace.

During this 20th year of observance, we urge a renewed commitment and intensity in the battle against HIV/AIDS to bring an end to this epidemic. Today, there are 1.1 million adults and adolescents living with HIV/AIDS in the U.S., with 232,700 unaware of their infections. Nearly half a million people in the U.S. are living with AIDS. African-Americans and Hispanics account for most of the country's new HIV/AIDS cases and deaths from AIDS-related causes. These are also the people least apt to receive proper medical care and treatment.

As we commemorate National AIDS Awareness Month, we thank all of those who care for or volunteer and advocate for improved prevention, treatment, and research of HIV/AIDS. We further encourage all to commit to advocacy, action, and prayer in the effort to fight the spread of HIV/AIDS in the United States.

Kathy Garner

Executive Director

AIDS Services Coalition

Hattiesburg