



July 13, 2009

The Honorable David Obey
Chairman
House Appropriations Committee
U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jerry Lewis
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Obey and Ranking Member Lewis:

On behalf of Trust for America's Health (TFAH), I am writing to applaud the Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies for eliminating the prohibition on federal funding for needle exchange programs in the Fiscal Year 2010 Labor-HHS legislation, and to urge the full Appropriations Committee to pass the bill without any additional restrictions on the use of these funds.

In May, TFAH released an issue brief, *Reducing Infectious Disease in the U.S.*, finding that one of the most effective, scientifically-based methods for reducing diseases -- needle exchange programs -- can dramatically reduce the number of Americans who become infected with hepatitis and HIV. A copy of our report is enclosed with this letter. TFAH is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to saving lives by protecting the health of every community and working to make disease prevention a national priority.

The burden of preventable infectious diseases in the United States is staggering. An estimated 3.2 million Americans have chronic hepatitis C infections, costing the country an estimated \$15 billion annually in health care costs. An estimated 1.0 to 1.2 million Americans are living with HIV and/or AIDS, and there are an estimated 56,300 new cases of HIV diagnosed in this country every year. Injection drug users currently account for 12 percent of all new HIV infections, according to a 2009 report from the CDC.

The public health and medical communities need proven disease prevention techniques in the battle against HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases. Needle exchange programs are cost-effective, successful, and supported by a broad range of scientific organizations, including the Institute of Medicine (IOM), World Health Organization (WHO), and American Medical Association (AMA). In 2008, CDC concluded that the incidence of HIV among injection drug users had decreased by 80 percent in the United States in part due to needle exchange programs. A wide range of domestic and international research on needle exchange has found that needle exchange programs significantly reduce rates of disease and **do not lead** to increased drug use. Our report reviews multiple prominent

studies of effective needle exchange programs that found no evidence of an increase in drug use, including studies by NIH, IOM and WHO.

Let me emphasize that removing the restriction on federal funding will in no way require states or localities to implement needle exchange programs; it will simply permit them to use federal HIV prevention funds for this purpose should they so choose, within the context of a broader HIV prevention effort. In those jurisdictions that already have needle exchange programs, local ordinances have determined how these programs should be managed. Removing this restriction will not preempt state drug laws.

We ask for your support in ensuring that the ban on federal funding is removed from the final version of the Fiscal Year 2010 Labor, Health and Human Services and Related Agencies appropriations bill and that no additional federal restrictions be placed on locally regulated needle exchange programs. We look forward to working with you on this and other important public health initiatives in the future. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact TFAH's Director of Government Relations, Richard Hamburg, at (202) 223-9876.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeffrey Levi". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jeffrey" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Levi".

Jeffrey Levi, PhD
Executive Director

Encl.

cc: Members of House Appropriations Committee