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Profile of the National AIDS Epidemic

As of June 2000, there are 900,000 people living with HIV and AIDS in the United States. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 300,000 people living with HIV do not know they are infected. Since the early 1980's, 438,795 people have died of AIDS in the United States. While the number of people dying from AIDS has declined as a result of recent drug therapies, the increasing numbers of new HIV and AIDS cases highlight the need for comprehensive HIV and AIDS prevention and care.

Communities of Color and AIDS

While Caucasians account for the majority of AIDS-related deaths in the U.S., the epidemic disproportionately affects communities of color. Communities of color comprise approximately 30% of the U.S. population, yet they account for more than 60% of all new AIDS cases. The U.S. Surgeon General has reported that between July 1999 and June 2000, Latinos and African Americans accounted for nearly 70% of new HIV cases. AIDS is the leading cause of death for African Americans ages 25-44 and the second leading cause of death among Latinos of the same age group. The Native American and Alaskan Native population has also experienced rising rates of HIV infection. It is estimated that for every one Native American diagnosed with HIV, there are five others who are unaware that they are living with HIV/AIDS.

Women and AIDS

Women represent the fastest growing group of new HIV infections in the United States. In 1999, women constituted 23% of all AIDS cases in the U.S. African American and Latina women represent less than one-fourth of all women in the United States, but they account for more than three-fourths (77%) of reported AIDS cases among American women.

Older Americans and AIDS

One in 13 people living with AIDS is over fifty. While the rates of HIV infection are growing among people

over fifty, surveys suggest that this population does not perceive themselves at risk. Sexually active heterosexual adults over 50 are less likely to use condoms and to be tested for HIV than sexually active young adults. More than half (52%) of older people living with HIV/AIDS are either African American or Latino.

Youth and AIDS

It is estimated that there are 40,000 new HIV infections each year in the United States. Half of the new HIV infections each year are among 15-24 year olds in the United States. However, 87% of young Americans do not believe they are at risk for contracting HIV. By their senior year of high school, 65% of students are sexually active and one in five has had sex with four or more partners.

Conclusion

HIV prevention is the only method of reducing the number of new HIV infections among communities of color, women, older Americans and youth in the United States.

The number of new HIV infections in the U.S. continues to rise, disproportionately affecting adolescents, older people and communities of color. Although the face of AIDS in the United States has changed over the years, many people still do not perceive themselves at risk for contracting HIV. A recent study reported that 31% of individuals were less concerned about AIDS than they had been previously, and 17% said they were less careful in their sexual behavior and drug use because of the availability of HIV

treatments. Yet the HIV drug therapies currently available are not a cure for AIDS. The drug regimens are challenging and do not work for everyone.

HIV prevention saves lives. U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher has noted that AIDS education and behavioral change can control the spread of HIV. HIV prevention programs can teach people how to modify risky behaviors and encourage everyone to learn their HIV status. Although prevention programs in the United States have been moderately successful with limited funding, over 300,000 people living with HIV are not aware of their serostatus. HIV prevention is the only method of reducing the number of new HIV

infections among communities of color, women, older Americans, and youth in the United States.