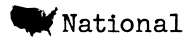
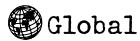


GMHC FOR THE RECORD

Analyzing trends and emerging issues in HIV and AIDS



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Contact us at: fortherecord@gmhc.org

State Senate Holds Special Session

ALBANY — The New York State Senate returned to Albany for a special session on Tuesday, September 16. While the Assembly did not reconvene, Speaker Sheldon Silver has said publicly that the Assembly will likely come back in October.

Among the issues addressed were legislation on toxic clean-up sites; Senate confirmations; and a technical budget “cleanup” bill, designed in part to resolve the \$200 million outstanding in legislative discretionary funding. The Governor has thus far refused to release the \$200 million, even though the Legislature overrode the Governor’s vetoes and approved it as part of the 2003–2004 State budget. The money is essential for HIV/AIDS service organizations, as well as countless other community groups. As it stands, these funds are needed to patch the gaping holes in service delivery resulting from years of cuts originally proposed in the

Governor’s Executive Budgets.

It appears a three-way deal has been struck behind closed doors to divide up the funding, with the Governor receiving \$60 million and the remainder to be split between the two houses of the Legislature. However, only half of the discretionary funding is expected to be distributed this year. As the Senate has passed this bill, all eyes are on the Assembly to do the same, thus resolving the final budget issues from last session.

GMHC Requests Exemption from Preferred Drug List for HIV-Positive Beneficiaries

ALBANY — GMHC is circulating a community sign-on letter asking Governor Pataki, Senator Majority Leader Bruno and Assembly Speaker Silver to exempt people living with HIV/AIDS from a Medicaid preferred drug list (PDL), should one be established. States around the country are now requiring Medicaid beneficiaries, including

those living with HIV/AIDS, to get “prior approval” before accessing drugs deemed “not preferred” by the state. If “prior approval” is not obtained, a prescription is denied at the pharmacy and a person can walk away empty-handed. For anyone who has ever dealt with an HMO’s red tape, it should not be surprising to learn that Medicaid beneficiaries encounter great difficulties navigating bureaucratic barriers and often end up without their medically necessary drugs. For HIV+ Medicaid beneficiaries, this is not just a hassle, but a life and death issue. While New York State has offered to exempt antiretrovirals, this is not nearly enough. HIV drug regimens are carefully constructed and require close monitoring of antiretrovirals and many other classes of drugs. This work is too important to be taken out of the hands of a care provider and turned over to a HMO-style bureaucrat at the end of a phone line. As such, HIV+ Medicaid beneficiaries should be taken out of harms way and exempted

entirely from the PDL. To get more details about the proposal and to sign-on to the letter, please contact David Wunsch at davidw@gmhc.org or (212) 367-1232.

HIV/AIDS Community to Monitor HIV SNPs Implementation

ALBANY — After several years of delay, New York State has begun voluntarily enrolling HIV+ Medicaid beneficiaries in managed care HIV Special Needs Plans (SNPs). Managed care specifically designed for people with HIV/AIDS is an important option for Medicaid consumers to consider. GMHC has outlined four “tests for success” that the HIV community can use to judge the performance of the SNPs: degree and success of outreach and education by the SNPs, the city and the state; consumer satisfaction with the enrollment experience and level of continuous care received by the enrollee; successful case management that integrates all aspects of enrollees’ care; and accountability for quality assurance. If SNPs are to succeed in a voluntary environment and generate interest and support from the HIV/AIDS community, these

tests will have to be passed. GMHC is hosting a community-wide forum on September 29 at 9:00 A.M. to discuss how to best ensure SNPs are a good health care option for people with HIV/AIDS. To RSVP or for more information, contact Laura Caruso at (212) 367-1228 or email laurac@gmhc.org.

Senate Passes Spending Bill That Falls Well Short of HIV/AIDS Needs

WASHINGTON, DC — The U.S. Senate last week passed its version of the FY 2004 Labor/HHS/Education Appropriation Bill, which funds the Ryan White CARE Act, domestic HIV prevention, the Minority AIDS Initiative, and numerous other domestic HIV/AIDS programs. Like its counterpart in the House of Representatives, the Senate bill provides woefully inadequate levels of funding for HIV/AIDS. The Senate passed the bill by a huge margin a day after it defeated an amendment offered by New York’s Senator Charles Schumer. The Schumer Amendment would have increased funding for the CARE Act by \$466 million, including a \$280 million increase for ADAP. Nationwide, many state ADAP

programs are in crisis due to several years of federal funding well below needed levels. In an ironic twist, several Senators from states that have instituted waiting lists voted against Schumer’s amendment.

The two bills go to a House-Senate conference committee to resolve the differences. As disappointed as they are with the bills, AIDS advocates are pressing the conference committee members to adopt the higher numbers for HIV/AIDS programs. In the midst of this, there is talk of an omnibus appropriations bill that would combine several individual appropriations bills. In past years, funding for HIV/AIDS has fared better in an omnibus bill than in the individual Labor/HHS/Education bill.

**Contact us at:
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