



For Immediate Release

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NYS Budget Expands State-wide Housing Access for People Living with HIV, But More Is Needed to Meet Ending the Epidemic Goals and Produce Long-Term Cost Savings

New York, NY (January 24, 2018) – Governor Andrew Cuomo’s executive budget takes a step forward in expanding housing support for people living with HIV outside of New York City. For the first time, enhanced rental assistance and a 30 percent rent cap for people living with HIV across New York State were included in the executive budget. Despite this laudable step, adjustments should be made to Article 7 of the budget to fully expand housing access to the estimated 3,700 New Yorkers living with HIV outside of New York City who are homeless or unstably housed.

Article 7 should be changed to require counties to expand housing support to cover 100% of the actual cost of renting an apartment. The current language makes the program optional and requires counties to cover just 80% of the cost. The state should tap into Medicaid savings of \$7,000 per person in order to help counties pay for these costs. The Medicaid funds will ensure that counties do not pay any more than they are paying now under the current rental assistance law.

Focusing on housing in the 57 counties outside of New York City will help meet the goal of Ending the HIV/AIDS Epidemic by the year 2020 in New York State. In those counties, HIV diagnoses dropped less than one percent from 2015-2016, while New York City diagnoses dropped 11 percent during the same time period. Unstable housing poses a formidable barrier to retaining New Yorkers living with HIV in care and providing access to HIV treatment that leads to viral suppression. Viral suppression is key to prevent new HIV infections; a person living with HIV who has an undetectable viral load cannot transmit the virus to others: “Undetectable equals Untransmittable” (U=U).

Enhanced rental assistance to this population will be cost effective as well. Investing in addressing social determinants of health is fiscally responsible. Conservative estimates show that improved housing security would prevent at least 58 avoidable new HIV infections each year—an annual savings in avoided lifetime HIV treatment costs of \$21 million—and reduce avoidable emergency and inpatient medical costs by over \$56 million annually.

“At Amida Care, New York’s largest not-for-profit Medicaid Special Needs health Plan and one of the few health insurance plans in the nation that specialized in health coverage for people who

live with HIV/AIDS, people of transgender experience, and people who are homeless, we know too well the devastating human and financial impacts of being unable to access care,” said Doug Wirth, president and CEO of Amida Care. “Now is not the time to be penny-wise and pound-foolish. Expanding access to housing this year will result in long-term savings many times over for New York by reducing the number of new HIV infections, hospitalizations, and emergency room visits. Investing in the end of HIV/AIDS is both the right and smart thing to do to save lives and dollars.”

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