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NY City Council Funds Amida Care's Consumer Workforce Initiative

Funding for New Program Helps Create Jobs for People with HIV in Peer Health Outreach

New York, NY (October 6, 2016) – The New York City Council has allocated \$200,000 under the End the Epidemic budget to fund Amida Care's Consumer Workforce Initiative program. Amida Care, New York's largest Medicaid special needs health plan (SNP) for people with chronic conditions such as HIV/AIDS, is launching the new initiative to create living-wage jobs for graduates of peer workforce training programs.

HIV peer workforce education trains people living with HIV to use their life experience for jobs in health navigation and outreach. The Consumer Workforce Initiative will create employment opportunities for people living with HIV, train them to reach others who are at risk of becoming infected, connect newly diagnosed people to care, and help more people become virally suppressed.

"A peer workforce offers a unique opportunity to connect with those who need it most, like many Amida Care members I work with every day, particularly those who are homeless, young men of color having sex with men (MSM), and transgender women," said Stephane Howze, Vice President and Ombudsperson of Amida Care. "Amida Care's Consumer Workforce Initiative creates an essential pathway to living-wage jobs and helps the most vulnerable New Yorkers receive equitable health care and treatment."

"Programs that train people living with HIV for health care jobs get us closer to ending the HIV/AIDS epidemic. But it's not enough to teach workers skills, they need real job opportunities," said Doug Wirth, President and CEO of Amida Care. "Amida Care thanks the City Council for allocating the funds to help make the Consumer Workforce Initiative a reality. It will make a difference in the lives of thousands of New Yorkers and create a healthier city for us all."

Amida Care especially thanks Council Members who have championed this program, including New York City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito; Finance Committee Chair Julissa Ferreras-Copeland; and members of the LGBT Caucus: Corey Johnson, who also serves as Chair of the Health Committee, Daniel Dromm, Ritchie Torres, James Van Bramer, Rosie Mendez, James Vacca, and Carlos Menchaca.

Governor Andrew Cuomo's [Blueprint to End the AIDS Epidemic in New York State by 2020](#) singles out employment as a critical factor to maintaining health and provides extensive recommendations on how job creation can help minimize new HIV infections. By creating living-wage jobs, programs like this can have a tremendous positive effect on health and ultimately help to prevent new HIV infections.

The new funding will give licensed primary care providers money to cover 50 percent of first-year salary costs for hiring graduates of peer workforce education training programs by organizations such as Housing Works, ASCNYC, and CAI (Cicatelli Associates). The providers include Acacia Network, Housing Works,

Harlem United, Brightpoint Health, SUNY Downstate, VIP Services, and Morris Heights Community Health Center, and there are two additional grant opportunities for licensed primary care providers. The funds would also provide support to ensure that providers are able to fully integrate peers into the workforce as well as to collect and analyze data on the impact of peer services on the health system.

Amida Care has experienced success in piloting programs with City Council funding, such as the Mobile Engagement Teams outreach program, which was later successfully integrated into Amida Care's health plan. The Mobile Engagement Teams initiative re-engaged nearly 1,000 HIV-positive individuals who were at risk of dropping out of care or failed to refill lifesaving medications, many of whom were not virally suppressed nor in good health.

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