



# Got AIDS? Consider this a Call to Arms.

It's been 20 years since the *New York Times* reported the first cases of the "gay cancer" we now call AIDS. Much has changed since then, of course. When we most needed hope, activists learned how to organize effectively. When we most needed a cause, scientists isolated HIV. When we most needed treatment, pharmaceutical companies rolled out new drugs. And now, when we most need a cure, the U.S. Supreme Court gives us George W. Bush.

Since his father signed the Ryan White CARE Act into law in 1990, Bush will be the first president not to increase federal AIDS dollars. In a world of mounting medical costs and escalating HIV-positive populations, a zero increase amounts to a net decrease. In other words, "level funding" means real cuts in vital services for people living with AIDS in South Florida. And this week, the Broward County HIV Health Services Planning Council, the panel that plans how the county will use its portion of the 1.8 billion federal AIDS dollars, will make difficult decisions about what those cuts might entail.

"Everything is on the table," said Nick Trivisonno, co-chair of the planning council's Priorities Committee. "You can expect flat funding in some service categories, cuts in some categories to help fund other categories, and possibly the elimination of some categories altogether."

On Tuesday, five working groups each assigned certain service categories will make specific recommendations to Trivisonno's committee, which in turn reports its

recommendations to the full council on Thursday. Both of the meetings are open to the public and the council encourages people with AIDS to attend.

"People with AIDS, especially those who rely on Ryan White Services, need to be at these two meetings," said Bill Marx, co-chair of the Joint Client Relations Committee. "The future of AIDS services here in Broward County is at stake. People with AIDS must assert their interests during this process or expect to be disappointed."

The outlook might seem brighter if 1.8 billion dollars had been adequate for this year's needs. But in spite of a 214 million dollar increase over funding levels for 2000, states hit hardest by AIDS are already colliding with enormous shortfalls.

The pinch is especially painful for the AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP), stressed by the ever mounting costs of the latest HIV therapies and by a surge of clients whose managed care programs abruptly adopted prescription drug caps. Here in Broward, the county health department administers the program, providing prescription drugs to over 7,000 people with HIV and AIDS.

The successful program has few critics. It saves not only lives, but money, too. Data suggests that for every dollar a county spends on AIDS drugs it can ultimately save seven dollars in primary, emergency and medical care costs. Nonetheless, a deficit exceeding a million dollars will soon force the agency to implement a waiting list for the first time. And Florida's secretary of health has

announced that he will implement a statewide waiting list on October 1, with future ADAP funding to be determined on a monthly basis as per each county's immediate need.

Of course, Ryan White CARE dollars buy much more than lifesaving medicine. Those same dollars contribute to the welfare of people with AIDS by funding outpatient medical and dental care, case management and client advocacy, food bank services and home-delivered meals, even support groups and transportation. Level funding for 2002 imperils all these services and more.

Whether they currently use Ryan White Services or not, people with AIDS can consider these facts a clarion call to arms. Just as we poured our energies into direct action, persuasive advocacy, and community responses in the late 1980's, so we must again. And for those wondering what that means in 2001, here are a few ideas:

**Participate in community planning.**

Voice your concerns about recommended changes to services. Attend the Priorities Committee meeting on Tuesday, July 24, or the full planning council's meeting on Thursday, July 27. Both meetings begin at 9 a.m. at the Galleria Professional Building (behind Borders) in suite 115. For more information, call Allison, Jennifer, or Debbie at 561.9681.

**Contribute to quality assurance.**

Help service providers and other people with AIDS establish standards of care and specific outcomes for local delivery of Title I services. The results of eight two-hour

meetings in each category will be submitted to the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). For more information, call Scott Campbell at 561.9681, extension 204.

**Support the People with AIDS Coalition (PWAC).**

Become a voting member of the PWAC of Broward County, make a financial contribution to underwrite advocacy and other activities, or attend the grand reopening of PWAC's facilities on September 25. For more information, visit the coalition online at [www.pwa.org](http://www.pwa.org).

**Act up. Fight Back. Fight AIDS.**

Volunteer for direct action. The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power of Greater Fort Lauderdale (ACT UP) meets every Tuesday at 6p.m. at the PWAC, 2302 N.E. 7 Avenue in Wilton Manors (across from Poverello.) Plans are already underway for a major demonstration this fall to protest level funding for AIDS services and other issues.

As a long-term survivor of AIDS, I know how tempting it is to forget that we are fighting for our lives. The struggle itself seems to wear on our already compromised immune systems. But to be silent now is to surrender. To be silent now is to discount all the lives touched by these vital services, forfeit the progress of the last two decades, and betray the heroism of those who fought before us. Somehow, I just know we can do better.

To contact Greg Scott, address your email to [gscott@expressgaynews.com](mailto:gscott@expressgaynews.com)

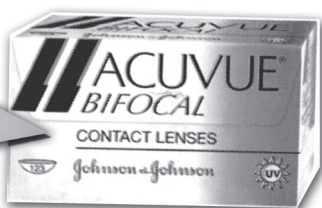
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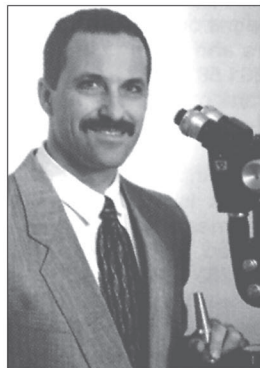
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