



County of San Diego

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

1600 PACIFIC HIGHWAY, ROOM 335, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA 92101-2470

MEMO

Date: October 31, 2014

To: Helen Robbins-Meyer

From: Supervisor Ron Roberts and Supervisor Dave Roberts

RE: Formation of an Ad-Hoc Committee of HIV Health Services Planning Council

Recently, we met with a group of concerned HIV/AIDS service providers and staff from the Office of San Diego City Council President Todd Gloria. They shared encouraging information about medical advances to address the HIV epidemic. They also shared concerns that many individuals who are infected are unaware of their status, and many individuals who are aware of their status are not accessing life-saving HIV care. While HIV testing, care and medicines are readily available in our county, these services are not being accessed by all HIV positive individuals. In response, we request to form an Ad-Hoc Committee of the County's existing HIV Health Services Planning Council. The committee would be tasked with gathering and reviewing data to create a plan to improve the current status of this disease in San Diego County.

Good reasons abound to be optimistic about further reducing the epidemic of HIV/AIDS. Mechanisms for testing over the past 10 years have improved greatly, and early detection of HIV is a crucial component in reducing the epidemic. Further, medical treatments, particularly anti-retroviral therapy (ART), can ensure that people with HIV will live longer and healthier lives.

Despite these advances, we are being told that there are still too many people in our communities who are not testing for HIV and are, therefore, unaware of their HIV status. Targeted education about the importance and availability of testing can help to reduce these numbers. We also need to address barriers that prevent people from getting tested or staying in medical care. Unfortunately, even in 2014, HIV remains a highly stigmatized disease, and many people avoid testing and treatment out of fear that they will be rejected by their families and communities. For those who are infected, but not receiving HIV primary care, we need to develop creative solutions to engage them in life-saving care. Doing so can significantly reduce the number of new HIV cases. Furthermore, persons living with HIV/AIDS, who are engaged in care and treatment-adherence, are far less likely to transmit the virus to others.

In San Diego County, the data collection efforts tell us that over the past decade the overall number of HIV cases has declined, although we have seen variances in certain sub-populations. Additionally, it is

cautioned that these numbers may not represent a true decline due to limitations in reporting and the assumption that there are an unknown number of individuals who do not know they are infected.

Other specific barriers that were shared with us regarding access to testing, medical care and medications include:

- Locating and accessing HIV testing sites and medical care and treatment, including operating hours, geographic location and type of sites available.
- Lack of broad awareness about, and availability of, medication regimens that can prevent HIV infection, such as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and non-occupational post-exposure prophylaxis (nPEP).
- Availability of support services critical to keeping individuals in care, such as medical case management, mental health and psychiatric services, substance abuse treatment, and transportation.
- Disparities in testing and medical care for Latino, African-American, low-income, youth, adults over the age of 50, drug using and female populations.
- Lack of visibility and knowledge by the general public regarding HIV and what “we” are doing to eradicate it.

In response to these concerns the community members recommended further analysis of the needs assessment and data San Diego County has captured in order to expand education, testing, treatment and prevention.

With these issues in mind, we respectfully request your assistance in working with the County’s HIV Health Services Planning Council to address concerns highlighted in this memo. As an advisory committee to the Board of Supervisors, we recognize that the Council performs a critical role in monitoring local HIV/AIDS demographics and prevalence and setting priorities for allocating the County’s Ryan White funding. As such, we believe the Council is well suited to lead this effort, with the support of appropriate Health and Human Services Agency staff, to develop recommendations to ensure barriers to services and information are addressed. This will include:

- Gathering and analyzing needs assessment, epidemiological and service utilization data;
- Developing a strategy for engaging with the private and public health care systems; and
- Identifying strategies to reduce fear and stigma, educate the public about HIV, build the capacity of the health care system to deliver PrEP and PEP, ensure routine HIV testing in health care settings, and ensure that those who are HIV-positive commence ART immediately.

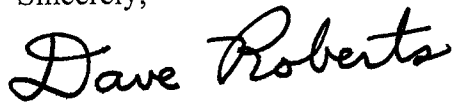
We request your assistance with establishing a time-limited sub-committee to complete these tasks. We recommend the Ad Hoc Committee include, but not be limited to, the following representatives:

- Incoming Chair, HIV Health Services Planning Council (Terry Cunningham)
- Chair, Priority Setting Committee, HIV Health Services Planning Council (Dr. Delores Jacobs)
- Chief, HIV, STD & Hepatitis Branch of Public Health Services (Patrick Loose)
- Coordinator, Testing & Counseling, HIV, STD & Hepatitis Branch of Public Health Services (Heidi Aiem)
- County-Contracted Ryan White Primary Care Providers
- Two Persons Living with HIV/AIDS

Additionally, we request that the Ad Hoc Committee recommendations be submitted to the full membership of the HIV Health Services Planning Council for input within 180 days. Upon approval by the Council, the recommendations should be forwarded to the Board of Supervisors for consideration.

Please know that we, along with Council President Todd Gloria, stand ready to assist in moving forward any creative solutions that are identified and forwarded to us. Thank you for your attention to this important matter and your continued leadership in administering services that impact vulnerable residents in our county.

Sincerely,



DAVE ROBERTS
Supervisor, Third District



RON ROBERTS
Supervisor, Fourth District