



October 1, 2020

B. Kaye Hayes, MPA
Acting Director, Office of Infectious Disease and HIV/AIDS Policy (OIDP)
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health (OASH)
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Room 715-G
Washington, D.C. 20201

Re: Draft *Sexually Transmitted Infections National Strategic Plan 2021-2025*

Dear Ms. Hayes,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the draft *Sexually Transmitted Infections National Strategic Plan 2021-2025* (STI Plan). The **HIV+Hepatitis Policy Institute** is a leading HIV and hepatitis policy organization promoting quality and affordable healthcare for people living with or at risk of HIV, hepatitis, and other serious and chronic health conditions. **HIV+Hep** is thankful the federal government has turned its attention to addressing the growing rates of STIs in the nation, particularly as they affect the syndemics of HIV and viral hepatitis. It is a great accomplishment to release the first strategic plan addressing STIs working across the Department of Health and Human Services and other federal departments.

In response to OIDP's questions in the *Federal Register* announcement, we agree that the draft plan's goals, objectives, and strategies appropriately address the STI epidemic. We support the draft plan's vision and appreciate the syndemic approach to STIs. Additionally, the plan is comprehensive, data driven, and well-organized; and it includes a strong discussion of social determinants of health and stigma.

The STI plan effectively demonstrates the disproportionate impact of STIs across a variety of populations, including men who have sex with men, young people, and racial/ethnic minorities—all populations also disproportionately affected by HIV. **HIV+Hep** is particularly pleased with the mention of the need to regularly test for STIs when someone is diagnosed with HIV and to conduct HIV screening when someone is diagnosed with a STI. Also critical, as acknowledged in the STI plan, is the emphasis on screening and education of Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) when someone is diagnosed with a STI. Increasing access to and uptake of PrEP is critical to the administration's *Ending the HIV Epidemic: A Plan for America*. It is also important for people on PrEP to be regularly screened for STIs.

HIV + HEPATITIS POLICY INSTITUTE

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Additionally, as we have experienced over the last several decades in the fight against HIV, the best results come when all interested parties—federal, state and local governments; medical providers; community-based organizations; and affected communities—work together to address critical public health issues and implement effective solutions based on scientific evidence, best practices, and community input. The draft STI strategic plan calls for all parties, whether those involved in HIV, hepatitis, or STIs, to work together and address each of these infectious diseases together.

Again, the **HIV+Hepatitis Policy Institute** applauds and is grateful for all the hard work across the federal government on this draft plan. We look forward to its finalization and implementation. Should you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact me at cschmid@hivhep.org or (202) 462-3042. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Carl E. Schmid II", enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

Carl E. Schmid II
Executive Director