

January 17, 2009

As of December 2008, the states of Montana, Nebraska, and Indiana have AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP) enrollment wait lists with a total of 53 people on the combined rolls. In essence, several HIV infected persons living in the US who qualify and are eligible to enroll into the ADAP program and receive ADAP covered medications are not. Their health, medical futures, and lives are at stake. They have no other means as they are uninsured or underinsured and living in the United States of America.

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, in 2007 there were 529 individuals on an ADAP enrollment wait list in multiple states across the U.S. It was reported that during 2007, some wait-listed patients in South Carolina died due to lack of access to medications. In addition, in 2007 six states implemented other cost-containment measures that limited access to other necessary medications for low-income persons who needed them.

In direct response to this deterioration of access to care and treatment, The Flowers Heritage Foundation established "Bridge The Gap" in September 2007. This extraordinary program's goal is to eliminate ADAP enrollment wait lists and increase access to the life sustaining medication that ADAP provides. The Bridge the Gap program literally saves lives using the most cost-effective means possible. To date, we have successfully provided funding for 35 wait-listed persons living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) in Montana to obtain needed prescription drugs for one year in 2007 and 2008.

Still, there remain increasing numbers of PLWHA in the U.S. who are not able to obtain needed HIV medications. It is anticipated that with the current U.S. economic downturn and newly expanding HIV screening and testing initiatives, these wait lists will return with extremely higher numbers by mid-2009 and continue to grow as new infections are discovered.

The Flowers Heritage Foundation (FHF) created the Bridge The Gap program to help insure that the life-saving medication needs of every low-income person living with HIV/AIDS in the U.S. are met. The Flowers Heritage Foundation was established by the Flowers family and is an outgrowth of their belief in giving back to the communities they serve. Sylester Flowers fostered these values through the everyday work and contributions from Ramsell Holding Corporation, which he began in 1967 after opening a single pharmacy in 1964 in East Oakland, California. Today, each of the five Ramsell business units underwrite all operating expenses for the Foundation. Therefore, 100 percent of grant and individual donor contributions can go directly to programs that benefit underserved individuals, in this case, to help PLWHA who have no other means for obtaining life-sustaining medications. Moreover, registration, enrollment, and other administrative mechanisms for Bridge The Gap are managed free of charge by Ramsell Public Health Rx (PHRx), one of the Ramsell businesses.

The numbers of marginalized PLWHA in the U.S. who are not able to obtain HIV medications is alarming. The Flowers Heritage Foundation and Public Health Rx also contribute consistently on a public policy level to change this unacceptable situation and insure adequate government funding is allocated for these purposes in the future. Right now, however, PLWHA are literally dying while waiting for medications, and we hope our corporate and business partners, and private donors will support us in addressing this unacceptable situation.

To date, the Foundation is the only organization that contributes to this cause.