

Come Together DC to Get the Correct Facts on Screening for HIV.

It is unfortunate that Housing Works would ignore the facts and feats of the District's campaign to lead the nation in establishing routine HIV screening in our city. No other city has been bold enough to implement the guidance of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) – ahead of schedule – to make HIV screening a routine part of health care. So, let's get the facts correct.

Fact: The Department of Health (DOH) has spent \$1.3 million – not \$8 million – on the screening campaign, with \$800,000 for 80,000 test kits and \$500,000 on year long public outreach. This is clearly written in the D.C. Appleseed report.

Fact: The District has greatly expanded – tripled actually – the free opportunities and locations for residents to be screened for HIV from 15 to 45 sites. DOH has distributed 40,000 test kits to D.C. health care and community providers.

Fact: In four months, more than 20,000 tests were conducted, with many more results still to be reported. In other words, the District has tested as many people in that period as were done in all of 2005. Of those tests, 500 people were found to be positive. We linked 500 people who did not know their status to care and treatment. Thousands more are getting an education on preventing HIV. Anyway you add up the numbers, I count the campaign a success.

Fact: The District is making significant progress in instituting routine screening in our health community. Howard University Hospital became the first hospital in the country to screen HIV routinely in all its health care settings. Unity Health Center is implementing routine screening in all of its 26 clinics. George Washington Hospital Emergency Room screened 2,000 people in its routine screening program. Next month, DOH will be sending packets of information to practicing physicians in the District on screening and names based reporting.

I'm not sure which schools the writers of the Housing Works AIDS Issues Update attended, but a B for HIV testing is not a lousy grade. The District knows it has much more work to do – interagency coordination and leadership, condom distribution, public school education, substance abuse treatment, among others – but, the District has come together in an extraordinary commitment to combat the epidemic. Criticism and advice are always welcome, but screen your facts correctly.

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