

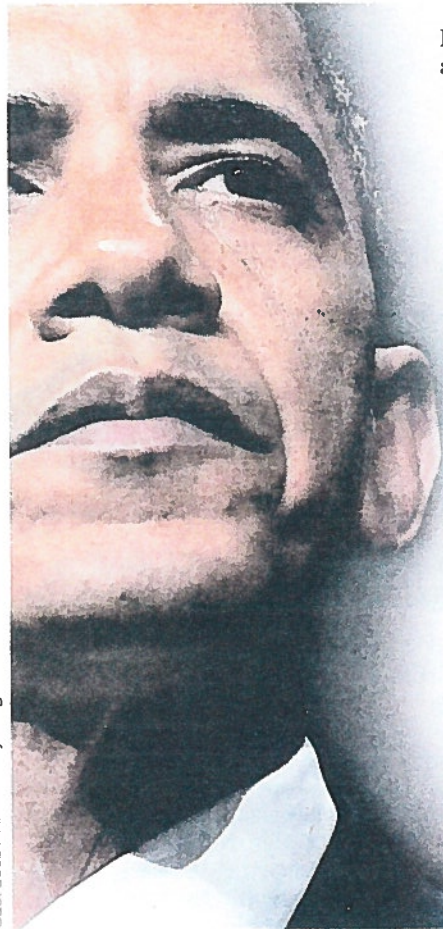
OPINION

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Finally — a national strategy to fight AIDS



Saul Loeb / AFP / Getty Images

By Susan Blumenthal and Bowen Jiang

The Obama administration released Tuesday its National HIV/AIDS Strategy, the first domestic action plan to combat HIV/AIDS since the emergence of the disease 30 years ago in San Francisco.

During those 30 years, many research advances — including the discovery of life-saving medications — have been made, but with this progress, the urgency about AIDS in America has faded into complacency.

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, Americans see and hear less

about the domestic HIV/AIDS epidemic today than they did five years ago. And, despite the fact that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates the number of Americans newly infected with HIV each year is 56,000 (higher than previously thought), the proportion of Americans who believe that HIV/AIDS is an urgent problem in the United States declined between 2006 and 2009.

Yet, every 9.5 minutes another American is infected with the virus. More than a million Americans are living with HIV/AIDS today, and 14,000 die of the disease annually. In Washington, D.C., 1 out of 30 people is HIV-positive — an infection rate higher than rates Ethiopia, Rwanda and Nigeria.

In recent years, the United States has played a powerful role in the fight against HIV/AIDS globally, which has infected 33 million people worldwide. The establishment of the President's Emergency Plan

for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and other initiatives have brought vital resources to the developing world and required recipient countries to establish national plans to address their epidemics.

But there has been AIDS amnesia here at home. The number of African Americans living with HIV in America exceeds the number of HIV-infected people in seven of the 15 focus countries in Africa supported by PEPFAR. And, the CDC budget for HIV/AIDS prevention has declined by 19 percent since 2002.

The Obama administration's strategy serves as a wake-up call to the persistence and prevalence of the epidemic in America. Our nation will now have an action plan and accountability that has been brought to the battle against this disease abroad. Key objectives of the strategy include: reducing HIV incidence by 25 percent within 5 years, increasing access to care and prevention services, optimiz-

ing health outcomes, and reducing HIV-related health disparities among vulnerable populations including gay and bisexual men and African American and Hispanic men and women.

For the strategy to be effective, all Americans must take action by learning more about HIV/AIDS, getting tested, using measures to protect against infection, working to shatter the stigma, contributing to the mission of AIDS organizations and advocating for increased funding for research and services. Together, let's work toward a future where AIDS will exist only in the history books.

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