COVID-19 Report Highlights Health Concerns for People of Color

A new report reveals essential health services for people of color were scaled down or discontinued amid COVID-19.

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COVID-19 has significantly affected organizations that provide HIV, sexually transmitted infection (STI) and hepatitis C (HCV) services to people of color across the United States, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and the U.S.-affiliated Pacific Islands, according to a new report spearheaded by three major HIV organizations.

For the report, titled "COVID-19 National Rapid Assessment on the Institutional Impact of COVID-19 on Organizations Providing HIV/STI/HCV Services to People of Color across the U.S., Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, and Affiliated Pacific Island Jurisdictions," the Black AIDS Institute, the San Francisco Community Health Center and the Latino Commission examined COVID-19's impact on the ability of organizations to continue providing HIV, STI and HCV services; their capacity to address COVID-19–related needs among their clients; and their capacity to integrate COVID-19 services as an added focus for their strategies.

Fifty-nine top executive leadership staff at 51 organizations were interviewed. In addition, 168 managers and 283 frontline staff at 142 organizations across the United States and its territories completed surveys for the assessment.

Findings showed that COVID-19 greatly impacted clients' health and psychosocial life. There were delays in HIV, STI and HCV testing and treatment as well as specialty care. Organizations also reported that COVID-19 severely affected clients' mental health, food security, financial stability and community connectedness and integration.

Organizations serving people of color also reported a need to increase service capacity despite staffing, funding and infrastructure limitations. Some organizations were forced to discontinue or scale down their services, while some pivoted to virtual and telehealth services.

In addition, COVID-19 affected in-person meetings with clients and decreased the number of clients served. However, many health organizations continued to provide HIV, STI and HCV preventive and care services.

Concerns over the short-term future of service ability, funding and staff burnout were also reported. Leadership staff—particularly in the Southern states and Puerto Rico—also reported worries about the impact of COVID-19, ongoing socioeconomic disparities and persistent geographic health disparities in the long term.

The three organizations concluded that report findings highlight “the need to address COVID-19’s differential impact across the United States and its territories, including individual and geographic technology gaps, lack of supportive services for vulnerable populations, suboptimal institutional infrastructure of small organizations in several geographic areas and inadequate emergency plans at the local, state and federal levels.”

For related coverage, read “HIV Center Awarded $5M for COVID-19 Testing.”

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