AIDS FOUNDATION HOUSTON LAUNCHES “RAPID START” HIV TREATMENT

The START Now Project links persons living with HIV to immediate treatment and care

HOUSTON — Beginning May 3, 2021, AIDS Foundation Houston, Inc. (AFH), in partnership with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, launched a rapid start anti-retroviral treatment project as a service to people diagnosed with HIV. START Now (Strategic, Targeted, Anti-Retroviral Treatment Now) is designed to provide linkage to care and treatment medication to persons newly diagnosed with HIV within the first seven days of their diagnosis. The project will also assist persons with linkage to care who have a previous HIV diagnosis who either have never been in care or have not been in treatment and care in the past twelve months. START Now aims to support patients in achieving sustained viral suppression, which prevents the transfer of HIV to another person through sex.

“We are proud to be one of 15 organizations across the nation that are funded by HRSA in this Special Project of National Significance (SPNS) to support this activity that is directly linked to our mission to end the HIV epidemic in the greater Houston area,” said John Huckaby, CEO of AIDS Foundation Houston. “START Now allows us to assist people living with HIV to be linked to care and helps patients reach viral suppression as soon as possible, which is a key goal in the CDC’s Ending the HIV Epidemic: A Plan for America.”

Persons wanting to enroll in START Now should contact the Linkage Case Manager, Antonisha Alves, at 713-623-6796 x 295. In addition, individuals can be referred to the program by other HIV prevention service organizations, Urgent Care facilities, Emergency Departments or other hospitals and clinics. The START Now team will ensure that patients get their treatment medication within 7 days of enrollment and schedule the patient for their first appointment with their long-term HIV treatment provider. The Linkage Case Manager will also perform the following activities to support the patient:

- Assist patient with enrollment into the Texas HIV Medication Program
- Attend the first two medical appointments with the long-term HIV care provider

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AIDS Foundation Houston announces new START Now program

- Help with understanding lab reports, with a specific focus on educating about viral load and viral suppression
- Assist in getting patients linked to supportive services included but not limited to: housing, medical transportation, mental health services and food resources
- After the first two medical appointments, meet with the patient at least once a month to discuss successes and challenges related to treatment and other services that help promote healthy living

Additionally, AFH now offers a number of services online, including HIV and STI testing, as well as consultations and prescriptions for PrEP, nPEP and START Now. AFH has also partnered with Mistr and Sistr to make PrEP more accessible. Patients can talk to a doctor virtually, handle the lab work at home, and get prescriptions delivered to their homes for free. Learn more about all services provided or make an appointment at www.AIDSHelp.org.

About AIDS Foundation Houston
AIDS Foundation Houston, Inc. (AFH), founded in 1982, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation that was the first AIDS Service Organization in Texas and remains a national leader in HIV/STD programming. With the goal of creating a community where HIV is stigma-free and rare, and people have equitable access to care, AFH works towards the mission of ending the HIV epidemic in the Houston area. AFH services include prevention education, HIV/STI testing, outreach in Texas prisons, PrEP care, supportive housing, food assistance, a summer camp for children, and supportive services to persons affected by HIV/AIDS. For more information, please visit www.AIDSHelp.org.

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