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## HIV SUMMIT ADDRESSES STIGMA ASSOCIATED WITH THE VIRUS

**(NEW ORLEANS) – December 9, 2022** – Ending HIV stigma was the featured topic at today's Stigma Summit. The Summit, part of the New Orleans Health Department's Bounce to Zero campaign, was held today at the Pan American Life Center's Conference Centre on 11. Approximately 100 participants attended.

Healthcare providers, public health agency officials and community members participated in panel discussions, breakout sessions and training workshops, where they discussed the many facets of HIV stigma and recommended strategies to end it. The Bounce to Zero campaign is being rolled out in New Orleans and seven surrounding parishes.

"HIV stigma is rooted in a fear of HIV and the misconceptions about how HIV is transmitted and what it means to live with HIV today," said Vatsana Chanthala, Director of Ryan White Services and Resources, a division of New Orleans Health Department. "This Stigma Summit and Bounce to Zero campaign is vitally important to continue the open discussion on HIV stigma and correct misconceptions."

HIV stigma is a form of discrimination affecting the emotional well-being and mental health of people living with HIV. The negative attitudes, beliefs and practices associated with HIV stigma motivate the public to fear, reject, avoid, and discriminate against people living with HIV or those vulnerable to HIV. Many people think of HIV as a disease that only certain groups get. This leads to negative value judgments about people who are living with HIV.

"Talking openly about HIV can normalize the subject and provides opportunities to correct misconceptions and help others learn more about HIV," said Ronald Thomas, Chair of the New Orleans Regional AIDS Planning Council. "Removing HIV stigma allows the widespread use of testing to provide early care and treatment, thus stopping the transmission of HIV."

The New Orleans metro area has the highest number of HIV cases in Louisiana and was identified as one of 57 priority jurisdictions in the federal effort of ending the HIV epidemic in the U.S. by 2030. According to the Louisiana Department of Health, there are 8,642 persons living with HIV in the New Orleans metro area, which represents 38% of the State's HIV cases. The eight parishes benefitting from the Bounce to Zero campaign have the highest cases of persons living with HIV in Louisiana. Nationwide, approximately 1.2 million people are living with HIV.

An estimated 38,000 Americans are newly diagnosed each year. While the overall number of new infections has dropped by 73% between 1984 and 2019, progress to further reduce those numbers has stalled. Without intervention, nearly 400,000 more Americans will be newly diagnosed over 10 years, despite the availability of tools to prevent transmissions. Bounce to Zero organizers aim to contribute to a drop in those numbers.

The Bounce to Zero campaign has a unique New Orleans feel with its nod to the Bounce music culture, made popular in the city in the 1980s. It is designed as a positive, forward-focused campaign to anchor the various parts of the overall initiative and encourage people to get involved.

In addition to being the centralized location for information on where to get support, treatment, and information, Bounce to Zero encourages people to actively get involved in ending the HIV epidemic by taking action in their own lives. Steps as simple as knowing your HIV status, talking about HIV, being informed, and educating others about prevention and treatment options help understand the subject.

Touting the importance and ease of participating in the campaign, New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell and Jefferson Parish President Cynthia Lee Sheng were among the first to sign their names on the Bounce to Zero Pledge.

Those who sign, pledge to:

- Listen, learn, and speak about HIV
- NOLA your HIV status
- Encourage routine HIV testing
- Respect people's identities and pronouns
- Support HIV awareness events throughout the year
- Remain committed to combating hatred and discrimination
- Use people-first language
- Display the Bounce to Zero messaging
- Maintain a safe space for diverse community members
- Share HIV testing, prevention, and treatment resources
- Encourage others to sign the Bounce to Zero pledge
- Speak up if you hear, see, or read stigmatizing or harassing comments or misinformation.
- Show compassion and support for individuals and communities more closely impacted.

The pledge can be found and signed at [www.bouncetozero.com](http://www.bouncetozero.com). The website also centralizes information on HIV, including where to find testing, primary care, and supportive services in Orleans, Jefferson, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St. Charles, St. James, St. John, and St. Tammany parishes.

Part of raising awareness about HIV includes sharing accurate information about the disease and access to prevention and treatment.

There are four main areas addressed within the campaign:

- **U = U**
  - Undetectable equals Untransmittable. People living with HIV who achieve and maintain an undetectable viral load – the amount of HIV in the blood – by taking and adhering to antiretroviral therapy (ART) as prescribed cannot transmit the virus to others.

- **PrEP and PEP**
  - Two abbreviations that refer directly to medications available to prevent HIV. PrEP, or Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis, is a daily pill or a bi-monthly injection that reduces the risk of getting HIV by 99% and is available at no cost to individuals who qualify. PEP refers to the use of antiretroviral drugs for people who are HIV-negative following a single high-risk exposure, including unprotected sex, occupational exposure, and/or injection drug use to stop HIV infection.
- **Centralized Linkage to Care**
  - The Bounce to Zero website contains a comprehensive suite of information specific for those newly diagnosed with HIV, those returning to treatment, or those seeking more information. Resources include where to find testing, prevention and treatment options, primary care providers, and more detailed medical information for each of the eight parishes involved. Individuals living with HIV seeking care and resources can call 504.884.3307.
- **At Home HIV Testing/NOLA Your Status**
  - Anyone is susceptible to the HIV virus. It is important for everyone to know their HIV status. Free at-home testing is available for people in the area. The test uses a mouth swab and provides results in just 20 minutes. At-home testing is discreet and includes access to confidential pre- and post-test counseling. Text “Test” to 504.290.0145 to receive free HIV at-home test kit.

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**MEDIA NOTE:**

A video of New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell’s message of support to end HIV stigma is available [here](#).