

Faith-based and Community Response to HIV/AIDS

Introduction

In 1996, President Bill Clinton signed into law the welfare reform bill (known as the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunities Reconciliation Act). A key feature of this act was its “charitable choice” provisions. Charitable Choice promoted the idea of states cooperating with faith-based and community organizations to involve them in the provision of health, social, and human services that could be eligible for federal dollars. Charitable Choice also protected the religious character of the participating religious organizations and the religious freedoms of the beneficiaries of these organizations’ programs and services.

The Bush Administration has made the support for and involvement of faith-based and community organizations in health, human, and social services one of its top domestic priorities. In signing Executive Order 13198n on January 29, 2001, President Bush, established the Centers for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives in five cabinet departments (Departments of Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Justice, Labor, and Education). Through this executive order and others, President Bush seeks to create a “level playing field” —that is, an equal and fair opportunity—for faith-based and community organizations to compete for federal resources to support program they have developed in response to community needs.

What the Faith-Based Initiative, as envisioned by President Bush, would do

The text of another executive order issued by President Bush on December 12, 2002, entitled *Equal Protection of the Laws for Faith-Based and Community Organizations*, provides a description of the fundamental objectives of the Faith-Based and Community Initiative. They are as follows:

A. Prevent organizations from being discriminated against “on the basis of religion or religious belief in the administration or distribution of federal financial assistance under social service programs.”

B. Prevent discrimination against current or prospective program beneficiaries on the basis of “religion, a religious belief, a refusal to hold a religious belief, or a refusal to actively participate in a religious practice.”

C. Ensure that faith-based and community organizations are eligible to compete for federal financial assistance used to support social service programs and “to participate fully in the social service programs supported with federal financial assistance without impairing their independence, autonomy, expression, or religious character.”

D. Require organizations that engage in “inherently religious activities, such as worship, religious instruction, and proselytization,” to offer those services “separately in time or location from any programs or services supported with direct federal financial assistance and ensure that participation in any such inherently religious activities is voluntary for the beneficiaries of the social service program.”

Faith-based organizations have a long history of health and human service work in the U.S.

America has a long history of health, human, and social service delivery by faith-based organizations. In the United States, these organizations have been providing essential services, such as child welfare, medical care, child care, housing, transportation, and counseling since the founding of the nation—and their work continues. In conducting this work, faith-based organizations have filled or reduced existing holes in federal, state, and local governments’ “safety net” of service programs. What follows is a brief description of some of the services provided by faith-based organizations.

The *Salvation Army USA*, well known for its multitude of community services, rehabilitation programs, and family services, provides a range of services that include emergency lodging, financial assistance, daycare services, substance abuse services, mental health care, respite care, and help locating missing persons.

Catholic Charities USA has a long history of providing social-safety-net services; through its community educational programs, it has provided educational support for parish-based services and has raised HIV/AIDS awareness. In 2002, its agencies provided help and created hope for more than seven million people.

The *Jewish Board of Family and Children’s Services* (JBFCS) of New York has been a leader in treating social problems for more than 110 years. It established the first mental health program of “permanency planning” for the children of parents living with AIDS.

The *Islamic Society of Northern America (ISNA)* has provided a range of services to achieve its vision of

contributing to the betterment of the Muslim community and society at large.

Partnerships between the federal government and faith-based organizations are not new

Faith-based and community organizations have been eligible for federal funding for decades, and many have secured—including organizations responding to HIV/AIDS.

In New York City, *God's Love We Deliver (GLWD)* has been preparing and delivering nutritious, high quality meals to men, women, and children living with HIV/AIDS since 1985. GLWD began its work by preparing and delivering 50 meals per day from the kitchen of West Park Presbyterian Church, and 2001, it delivered its five-millionth meal. In 1991, GLWD received its first funding from the Ryan White Care Act.

In Minneapolis, MN, *Community Fitness Today (CFT)* improves the health of minorities through education, fitness, nutrition, and prevention services. It began when Marie Graham and the late Dwight McWilliams approached their pastor with an idea for a program to educate parishioners about HIV/AIDS. CFT is supported by the American Red Cross African American HIV/AIDS program, which is funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In Nashville, Tennessee, *Metropolitan Interdenominational Church*, through its First Response Center, provides SAMHSA-funded substance abuse outreach and HIV prevention services based on the religious tenet "whosoever" may enter is welcome and on scientifically proven public health models of harm and risk reduction.

Faith-based and community organizations have been long-engaged in the response to HIV/AIDS

The HIV/AIDS services provided by the organizations that have been discussed thus far are not unusual. Almost since the beginning of the AIDS crisis in the U.S., faith-based organizations have been part of the domestic response. Many churches, religious institutions, and faith-based organizations have AIDS ministries and community outreach programs specializing in services for HIV/AIDS prevention education. Several such organizations are highlighted below.

The *Metropolitan Community Church of San Francisco*, the second oldest congregation in the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, has been responding to the domestic HIV/AIDS crisis since the 1980s. MCC San Francisco offers a continuing array of pastoral services, group support, and education for those with HIV/AIDS and other chronic and life threatening illnesses, such as breast cancer.

Building trust and transforming lives, the health clinic of the *Glide Memorial Methodist Church* (known as the Glide-Goodlett HIV/AIDS Project and Recovery programs) provides housing and supportive services in downtown San Francisco which offer much more than treatment and advice.

They give respect and support to people long accustomed to getting neither.

Based in Seattle, Washington, *Multifaith Works* is a nonprofit, nondenominational organization. Representing a network of churches, Multifaith Works provides housing and supportive services to people living with life-threatening illnesses, including AIDS. As part of its AIDS Care Team Program, Multifaith Works recruits and trains volunteers to provide practical support and friendship to people living with HIV/AIDS.

Since 1989, *The Balm In Gilead*, through its Black Church Week of Prayer for the Healing of AIDS, has been the catalyst for educating and mobilizing over 10,000 churches to provide AIDS education for their congregations and communities. Today, with an estimated reach of over 2.5 million individuals, the Black Church Week of Prayer for the Healing of AIDS is the nation's largest AIDS awareness program targeting the African American community. The Balm In Gilead recently began an HIV/AIDS religious leadership training program in five African countries.

AIDS Action's policies

Faith-based and community organizations are currently providing a variety of services to people living with HIV/AIDS. Properly designed, the faith-based and community initiative will help to expand the national response to HIV/AIDS. AIDS Action supports the Faith-Based Initiative with the following provisions:

- The Faith-Based and Community Initiative itself should be funded with new money. Moreover, new money should be added to the already existing appropriations for all HIV/AIDS programs whose applicant base will be expanded by the implementation of the Faith-Based and Community Initiative.
- The official definitions of "faith-based and community organizations" must be broad enough to capture the full range of diversity within the U.S. faith and social services community. Additionally, emphasis should be placed on smaller faith-based and community organizations in order to enhance and strengthen their capacity to respond to community needs.
- When assessing faith-based and community organizations as applicants for federal funding, the government should give priority consideration to those applicants who, as they develop and implement their HIV/AIDS programs, seek the counsel and collaboration of individuals living with and affected by HIV/AIDS.
- Faith-based and community organizations must use scientifically evaluated methods in their delivery of HIV/AIDS prevention, care, and support services and must exercise non-discriminatory hiring practices.