

National Housing and HIV/AIDS Research Summit

BY EMILY BONIFACI AND THE NATIONAL AIDS HOUSING COALITION

On June 11 & 12 the National AIDS Housing Coalition (NAHC) hosted the innovative National Housing and HIV/AIDS Research Summit in Atlanta, Georgia at the Emory Center for AIDS Research (CFAR). This forum gave an unprecedented opportunity for researchers and policy experts to present existing research, share strategies regarding future research projects, discuss the implications of the research, and examine disparities in access to care and health outcomes.

The Summit's convening researchers included:

- Angela Aidala, Ph. D., of the Center for Applied Public Health at Columbia University and the Department of Sociomedical Sciences
- Dennis Culhane, Ph. D., of the Leonard Davis Institute of Health Economics and the Cartographic Modeling Lab at the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Work
- David Holtgrave, Ph. D., of the Rollins School of Public Health at Emory University

Also in attendance were a number of leading experts on housing policy and health care access, including NAHC Board members.

The Summit gathered under the premise that inadequate housing places vulnerable persons at heightened risk of HIV infection and complicates access to health care for persons living with HIV/AIDS, contributing to negative health outcomes for individuals and the community. Research has consistently revealed histories of homelessness among 40% or more of all Americans living with HIV/AIDS, and has implied that homelessness and unstable housing are factors contributing to increased risk of HIV infection.

Despite the important relationship between housing status and health outcomes for persons living with HIV/AIDS, there has been limited published research on the topic and existing studies are difficult to access. Publicly funded health care, case management and homeless services gather substantial data for purposes of HIV program reporting and evaluation, but there has been limited analysis of this data beyond basic demographic reporting and needs assessments. Moreover, few researchers have access to both the data and the skills necessary to evaluate costs and health outcomes. The Summit provided a timely opportunity to collaborate on the effects housing has on HIV prevention, quality of life, and access to care.

Researchers presented topics including:

- Epidemiological overview of housing status and HIV/AIDS
- Housing as an HIV prevention intervention
- Housing and HIV treatment access, adherence, and outcomes

Following the research presentations, policy experts spoke about the current and anticipated public policy challenges and opportunities surrounding HIV/AIDS and housing. The group discussed the policy implications of the research, gaps in research including recommendations for future research, and ways to effectively use results as a mechanism for public policy change.

The Sunday afternoon portion of the Summit consisted of a community discussion involving 45 participating researchers, policy experts, AIDS housing providers, and consumers. The discussion began with a brief presentation of the Summit's genesis and goals, and included an overview of the results by the convening researchers. Two panels followed, involving a housing advocate, housing providers, AIDS housing consumers, and representatives from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and HUD.

Immediate goals of the Summit include the production and dissemination of a white paper that summarizes existing research and the results of the Summit discussions, as well as a proposed research plan that identifies research gaps and proposes concrete strategies for ongoing work. These documents will serve as a reference for researchers and planners, will outline a common framework for ongoing research, and will foster collaboration and effective data collection and analyses. Summit participants hope to publish a special journal issue devoted to the examination of housing and HIV prevention, and treatment outcomes.

Emily Bonifaci is a Policy Assistant at the National AIDS Housing Coalition. For more information about the National AIDS Housing Coalition and the Housing and HIV/AIDS Research Summit visit www.nationalaidshousing.org.



Community members at the research summit had opportunities to network, share best practices, and discuss the opportunities and challenges in the field. Photo Courtesy of National AIDS Housing Coalition.