



Advocates for Youth Policy Brief The GAO Report on PEPFAR Prevention Programs April 2006

Background

On April 4, 2006, the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report reviewing how the Office of the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator (OGAC) administers funds for HIV prevention through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). The U.S. Leadership against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria Act of 2003ⁱ authorized the creation of PEPFAR and recommended that 20 percent of funds designated to fulfilling the law be designated to prevention. Of that 20 percent, the law mandated that 33 percent should be dedicated to abstinence-until-marriage programs.

The GAO report was a request of both Republican and Democratic members of Congress concerned about the implementation of HIV and AIDS prevention efforts in PEPFAR. The report overviews: trends and allocations of PEPFAR prevention funding, describes PEPFAR's strategy for preventing the sexual transmission of HIV, and examines challenges to PEPFAR's sexual transmission prevention strategy.ⁱⁱ

Key Findings

- Ten countries requested exemptions from OGAC in fulfilling the earmark between September 2005 and January 2006, citing the following challenges: **reduced spending for Preventing Mother-to-Child Transmission (PMTCT), limited funding to deliver appropriate prevention messaging to high-risk groups, lack of responsiveness to cultural and social norms, cuts in medical and blood safety activities, and elimination of care programs.**ⁱⁱⁱ
- **OGAC is over-interpreting the abstinence-until-marriage earmark** by applying it to all prevention funding although, by law, it only applies to funds appropriated to the Global HIV/AIDS Initiative account, which amounted to an additional \$33 million in fiscal year 2006.^{iv} Instead, OGAC is also applying the abstinence-until-marriage earmark to prevention funding for the CDC Global AIDS Program, the Child Survival and Health account, and the Freedom Support Act account as well as to the Global HIV/AIDS Initiative account.^v
- The lack of clarity from OGAC on how to implement Abstinence, Be Faithful, Use Condoms (ABC) programs **has caused major confusion and challenges** for U.S. government staff and partners implementing programs in PEPFAR countries.
- A lack of clarity about what is permitted in regard to "C" (condom activities) has **created a culture of fear amongst PEPFAR implementing partners** who are concerned about "crossing the line between providing information about condoms and promoting or marketing condoms."^{vi} One PEPFAR partner NGO said that "although the organization views condom demonstrations as appropriate in some settings it believes that condom demonstrations, even to adults, are prohibited under PEPFAR."^{vii}
- The abstinence-until-marriage earmark **thwarts the ability of country teams to respond to local needs.** Seventeen of the 20 PEPFAR country teams interviewed reported that the earmark "presents challenges to their ability to respond to local epidemiology and cultural and social norms."^{viii} Constraints include being forced to reduce spending for PMTCT programs and limiting funding for prevention messages to high risk groups.^{ix} Funding limitations also mean that countries **lack the ability to change program focus to respond to changing prevention needs.**

- Despite the fact that OGAC’s guidance on ABC programs requires the programs be integrated, “about half of the 15 focus country teams reported that **meeting the abstinence-until-marriage earmark undermines their ability to integrate ABC programs as required.**”^x Country teams went even further to say that segregating AB from other prevention funding compromises prevention programs for at-risk groups that need comprehensive messages.

GAO Recommendations

The GAO has recommended that OGAC collect information from country teams on the effect of the earmark on HIV sexual transmission prevention programs and provide it in an annual report to Congress. The GAO further recommends that Congress “use this information to assess the extent to which the spending requirement supports the Leadership Act’s endorsement of both the ABC model and strong abstinence-until-marriage programs.”^{xi}

Advocates for Youth calls on the U.S. Congress to repeal the abstinence-until-marriage earmark

This report provides more proof that this Administration’s ideology thwarts proven public health science and is hardly the first time the earmark has come into question. Recently, the Society for Adolescent Medicine (SAM), in one of the most exhaustive reviews to date of domestic government-funded abstinence-only programs, rejected current Administration policy that promotes abstinence as the only sexual health prevention strategy for young people. On the topic of PEPFAR, SAM’s report stated, “Human rights groups find that U.S. government policy has become a source for misinformation and censorship in these countries. U.S. emphasis on abstinence may also have reduced condom availability and access to accurate information on HIV/AIDS in some countries.”^{xii}

A *Baltimore Sun* article that disclosed OGAC’s efforts to shift even more dollars into abstinence-only programs while cutting back on support for condoms led Duff Gillespie, who headed AIDS programs at USAID until 2002, to say publicly that this policy is “outrageous and stupid. . .[and] from a public health policy point of view, it’s irresponsible.”^{xiii}

Sadly, this report suggests that U.S. policy is impeding, not leading, efforts to stem the tide of HIV and AIDS. Unless Congress repeals the abstinence-until-marriage earmark, U.S. global AIDS programs will continue to cause more harm than good while also weakening global HIV prevention efforts.

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ⁱ Pub. L. No. 108-25.

ⁱⁱ United States Government Accountability Office. GLOBAL HEALTH: Spending Requirement Presents Challenges for Allocating Prevention Funding under the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. [GAO-06-395] Washington, D.C.: The Office, 2006; p. 2

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid. p. 37

^{iv} Ibid. p. 5

^v Ibid. p. 30

^{vi} Ibid. p. 32

^{vii} Ibid. p. 33

^{viii} Ibid. p. 6

^{ix} Ibid. p. 6

^x Ibid. p.34

^{xi} Ibid. p. 46

^{xii} J. Santelli *et al.* Abstinence-only education policies and programs: a position paper of the Society for Adolescent Medicine. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 2006; 38: 83-87.

^{xiii} Kohn, David. More HIV funds to promote abstinence; researchers call policy misguided. *The Baltimore Sun*, December 10, 2005. Pg. 1A