



## EARLY TREATMENT FOR HIV ACT (ETHA)

### **The Problem**

Currently, childless adults living with HIV generally only qualify for Medicaid coverage once they become eligible for Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Because an individual is not eligible for SSI until they become disabled, a person with asymptomatic HIV infection is not eligible for Medicaid until he or she has progressed to full-blown AIDS. Without access to Medicaid, many low-income, HIV-positive individuals lack the ability to receive medical care that would help to slow the progression of the disease and prevent the onset of opportunistic infections.

### **The Solution: Early and Critical Treatment Lead to Taxpayer Savings**

The Early Treatment for HIV Act (ETHA) would permit state Medicaid programs to provide HIV treatment to individuals before they develop AIDS. The Act would amend Title XIX of the Social Security Act to provide states with the option of covering low-income, HIV-positive people as “categorically needy.” States taking advantage of this option would be provided with an enhanced federal Medicaid match. Treating those who are HIV-positive early in the progression of the disease provides numerous benefits. Providing therapy earlier keeps individual viral loads suppressed and delays the onset of opportunistic infections. Lower viral loads decrease the transmissibility of the disease and thereby reduce new infections. Most importantly, early treatment improves the quality of life for countless HIV-positive individuals.

In providing this critical treatment, ETHA would also create significant savings for taxpayers. Additionally, ETHA would lessen the strain on other federal HIV/AIDS programs, such as those funded by the Ryan White CARE Act.

### **Catholic Support**

79% of U.S. Catholics believe that the use of condoms is Pro-Life because it prevents the spread of HIV/AIDS. *Catholic Attitudes on Condoms in the Prevention of HIV and AIDS: Analysis of a survey in five nations for Catholics for Choice*, 2007.

### **Catholic Talking Points**

- As Catholics, we are called to care for the sick, comfort the infirmed, and work in solidarity to find cures and treatments. We do this freely and without religious tests for offering our services.
- ETHA provides American Catholics a vehicle to join the domestic and global effort to prevent the spread of HIV and to care for those living with HIV/AIDS.
- ETHA includes broad religious exemptions and does not apply to our church, nor any of our privately funded church organizations and programs.

### **Catholic Social Teaching and Scripture**

"As members of the Church and society, we have a responsibility to stand in solidarity with and reach out with compassion and understanding to those exposed to or experiencing this disease. We must provide spiritual and pastoral care as well as medical and social services for them and support for their families and friends." U.S. Catholic Conference, "The Many Faces of AIDS: A Gospel Response," 1987.

**Catholic Constituent Faces of ETHA:** Available upon request