

ARCW and Community Advocates partnership receives \$1.2 Million Federal Grant to expand HIV, HCV and Substance Abuse Prevention

SEPTEMBER 7, 2013 – Milwaukee Courier

New collaboration will ensure both HIV-positive and HIV negative women of color will have increased access to critical services

A new collaboration between the AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin (ARCW) and Community Advocates has been awarded a new three-year, \$1,262,534 grant by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration of the US Department of Health and Human Services. With this funding, ARCW and Community Advocates will expand substance abuse, HIV, and hepatitis C (HCV) prevention services as well as Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse (AODA) treatment services targeting African American women in Milwaukee.

“Unfortunately, African American women in Milwaukee experience alarmingly high rates of HIV infection and many face significant challenges related to alcohol and substance use and abuse,” said ARCW president and chief executive officer Mike Gifford. “Through this strategic partnership with Community Advocates, we will be able to help African American women in Milwaukee access the medical and mental health services they need to overcome addiction and stay safe from HIV.”

Addressing substance abuse issues facing African American [BK1] women is a vital component in the battle to prevent new HIV infections.[BK2] African Americans account for 50 percent of reported HIV infections in Milwaukee County in 2012, but only compose 27 percent of the County’s population. Moreover, the rate of HIV infection among African American women is 25 times greater than the rate among Caucasian women.

Studies also show African American women are at increased risk for using or relapsing into substance abuse and subsequently, engaging in behavior that lead to HIV infection. In Milwaukee County, more than 7,500 African American women have substance abuse treatment needs.

The stark data and growing concerns that African American women struggling with AODA issues lack access to HIV and HCV prevention services, and that African American women living with HIV and HCV lack access to AODA treatment, led ARCW and Community Advocates to pursue joint funding to support the new collaboration[BK3].

With the support made available for this new partnership, ARCW and Community Advocates will be better equipped to provide HIV prevention and testing, as well as substance abuse treatment.

“We know behind the data and statistics are real women and families impacted by this issue, said Joe Volk, chief executive officer at Community Advocates.

“The need for this type of collaboration is apparent in the community, and we are committed and glad to be working with partners like ARCW who are equally committed to addressing this issue.”

Improved prevention and treatment options for women [BK4] enrolling in the programs made possible with this funding is also hoped to create a ‘ripple effect,’ as African American women with AODA issues often face homelessness, domestic violence, poverty, and sexual exploitation.

The timing of the new partnership is especially critical as local alcohol and substance abuse rates have skyrocketed in recent years.

According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, Milwaukee ranks seventh in the nation for urban areas in past-month binge drinking and first in percentage of persons with past-year alcohol abuse or dependence. Moreover, according to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, alcohol use by women of childbearing ages, 18 – 44 years old, is 68 percent in Milwaukee compared to 50 percent nationally.

“The high rates of alcohol and substance abuse in Milwaukee have both societal and financial consequences for our community and result in increased risk for contracting HIV,” Gifford said. “By connecting more people to the care and treatment they need, we can save lives from HIV and overdose and begin to reverse the troubling increases in costs associated with alcohol and substance abuse.”

Health care costs for drug-related hospitalizations in Wisconsin totaled \$287 million in 2010, an increase of 126 percent from the \$127 million in 2002.

“The impact of substance abuse and HIV on all fronts – whether it’s health related, financial or otherwise – for the Milwaukee community and beyond cannot be underestimated; we must address it more comprehensively and collaboratively in order to make the needed impact,” said Volk.

Currently, the three-year collaboration is projected to reach 9,900 women; conduct 600 HIV and 800 HCV tests; and provide AODA treatment and counseling for 492 women. Services offered under the grant award will begin during spring 2014.

About AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin The AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin is home to the ARCW Medical Center – Wisconsin’s largest and fastest growing HIV health care system. Through its integrated medical, dental and mental health clinics along with its pharmacy and dedicated social services that include food pantries, a legal program, housing support and social work case management, more than 3,000 HIV patients in Wisconsin gain the health care and social services they need for long-term survival with HIV disease from ARCW.