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Recognizing People Living with HIV, Even in Employment

July 15, 2014 – The United States People Living with HIV Caucus (HIV Caucus) congratulates Congresswoman Barbara Lee (D-CA) in actively encouraging people living with HIV (PLHIV) to apply to a recent job announcement about HIV and health policy. This kind of active recruitment ensures that PLHIV consider applying. The HIV Caucus recognizes this in a long line of Congresswoman Lee’s strong support of PLHIV, including her support of the REPEAL ACT and other efforts to end discrimination against PLHIV. Oakland, CA-resident, Positive Women’s Network – USA Executive Director, and Policy Chair of the HIV Caucus, Naina Khanna states, “I am proud to be a resident in Congresswoman Lee’s district. She remains one of the few long-term staunch supporters of HIV in the legislature, and this demonstrates her commitment to creating economic opportunities for people with HIV.”

So many advocates living with HIV have found their voice and expertise in real world experience, without the benefit of college degrees in policy or public health. Barb Cardell, Boulder, Colorado-based advocate and Vice-Chair of the HIV Caucus, asserts “Before I was diagnosed with HIV, I was a chef. Now I’m an advocate. And most employers would have a hard time finding the connections.”

Changes in the world of HIV services have affected hiring practices. Where once, life experience was considered valuable, more and more non-profits require college degrees in fields like education, public health and policy for their job postings. While degrees serve as certification in some areas – such as clinical staff (e.g. nursing, mental health, etc.) – at community based organizations (CBOs), it is less clear what function these degrees serve in other employment lines, such as public policy or administration.

“Roughly a month ago on a list serve, advocates raised concerns relating to a high-profile HIV non-profit’s job announcement – pointing out that this can deter PLHIV from applying. After some back and forth, the agency amended it’s posting to encourage PLHIV to apply,” shares Michael Emanuel Rajner, Broward County, Florida-based HIV advocate and HIV Caucus Steering Committee member.

Job postings should include the kinds of life experiences that would be considered important in the job, especially in HIV and health. “For decades, grassroots health movements – like the Women’s Health, Indigenous Rights and the PLHIV Movements - have proven that personal experience is a useful and necessary tool in understanding what is happening to and with our bodies,” comments Dr. Andrew Spieldenner, Assistant Professor at Hofstra University and Co-Secretary of the HIV Caucus, “The professionalization of HIV has moved *against* the notion that the personal is not only political, but valuable.”

Employment-based HIV stigma is a serious concern for PLHIV. Laurel Sprague, Coordinator of the Global Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS- North America (GNP+/NA) and Steering Committee member of the HIV Caucus, points out, “So many of us experience overt,



subtle and perceived forms of HIV stigma where we work – in the way people talk (or don't talk) about HIV, homophobia, racism and sexism; and in the workplace policies around health insurance coverage, adequate time for medical appointments, and concerns about exposure to other colleagues' illnesses." GNP+/NA works with other GNP+ branches in implementing an HIV Stigma Index, which identifies how and where PLHIV experience HIV stigma in different regions.

"The HIV Caucus is the most representative network of PLHIV in the United States today. We believe that the voices of people living with HIV are important and must be present at every table that makes decisions about our lives. As we say in the Caucus: nothing about us without us," declares Cecilia Chung, San Francisco-based HIV advocate and Chair of the HIV Caucus, "We demand for the meaningful inclusion of PLHIV at every level of HIV non-profit organizations."

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The United States People Living with HIV Caucus is a group of organizations, networks, client groups, and individuals with HIV advocating for people living with HIV in the U.S. The Caucus is dedicated to being a platform for a united voice for people living with HIV in the US. For more information, see the website: www.hivcaucus.org.