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Federal funding cuts force HIV testing reimbursement change; Most patients unaffected

The West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources Division of STD, HIV and Hepatitis will see a federal funding reduction of \$201,368 in 2013 as part of the National HIV/AIDS Strategy (NHAS) which calls for a redirection of funds to areas of the country with higher incidence of HIV/AIDS disease. Since WV is a low incidence state for HIV/AIDS, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has reduced funding over the last two years by a total of \$617,541.

State Health Officer and Commissioner for Public Health Dr. Marian Swinker said, "One of the program areas that will be impacted by this year's reduction in federal funding is the elimination of the \$20 reimbursement for HIV test specimen collection and counseling services. Last year that money went to 15 local health departments providing HIV counseling and testing in areas with elevated prevalence, totaling \$92,000. Two years ago, all 49 health departments received the \$20 reimbursement fee, but the effort was downsized to 15 health departments in 2012 after CDC reduced funding to target areas based upon having HIV morbidity. Thus, the funding cut this year was not surprising, as federal funds are being targeted more narrowly, nationwide."

Existing federal funds will continue to cover the costs of the actual lab testing by the WV Office of Laboratory Services meaning health departments will continue to receive free HIV lab testing services. Dr. Swinker said, "We understand that without the added counseling and specimen collection reimbursement, HIV testing may not be available everywhere and on every day. Despite the federal funding cuts two years ago, WV local health departments have found ways to continue to offer HIV service screening and counseling on select days, because they understand the importance of this basic public health service and prevention opportunity for their community. Each one of those health departments should be commended. Every negative test is an opportunity to discuss high risk behaviors and emphasize prevention."

Most WV patients will not be affected by the change in funding, since HIV counseling and specimen collection are currently delivered without charge at health departments that offer the service. Dr. Swinker said, "We have only heard from one of the 15 affected health departments indicating that they may no longer offer this service without reimbursement. However, all but one of the other health departments affected by this federal funding cut have already committed to continuing to offer this important public health service."

Dr. Swinker said, "The remaining \$119,368 of the federal funding cut this year is being absorbed by the Bureau for Public Health's Division of STD, HIV and Hepatitis. We've all been affected by federal funding cuts." To learn more about HIV/AIDS prevention or available testing, go to <http://www.dhhr.wv.gov/oeps/std-hiv-hep/Pages/default.aspx> or call (800) 642-8244.