



# AIDS advocates say state budget is workable, given budget constraints

by [GARY BARLOW](#) on Jun 23, 2011 • 2:47 pm [0 Comments](#) and [0 Reactions](#)

CHICAGO – While they'd of course like to see more spending on HIV/AIDS services and preventions, officials with the AIDS Foundation say the budget approved by the Illinois Legislature for HIV/AIDS is workable and realistic, given the state's overall budget constraints.

"The governor started out with a budget with a \$3.5 million cut in HIV/AIDS funding, and the Legislature put \$2 million back in, so that's already a significant victory," said AFC's John Peller.

Quinn's budget proposal was deemed too far out of balance by legislators this spring, so the House and Senate crafted their own. The House estimate of state revenues for fiscal year 2012 is \$33.2 billion, lower than both the governor's estimate – \$33.9 billion – and the Senate estimate of \$34.3 billion.

House members, Democrats and Republicans alike, refused to go along with the higher estimates and won out in the end, getting a budget passed that uses their lower estimated revenues as a base.

That means a six percent cut in state spending for FY2012, but with the work by AIDS advocates and legislators such as Rep. Sara Feigenholtz (D-Chicago), who chairs the House committee that oversees health spending, the cuts in HIV/AIDS funding at the Illinois Department of Public Health amount to \$1.5 million less than FY2011, a cut of about five percent.

If the state makes changes recommended by AFC and others in how it spends that money, that's a cut the state can live with, Peller said.

"From a process point of view, there's no way to get additional funding right now," Peller said. "In a lot of ways we're out of options and we have to focus on making sure the money the state has works."

To that end, Peller said, AFC sent a memo to Gov. Pat Quinn (D) outlining the changes it wants to see in order to put that HIV/AIDS funding to best use. It starts with accountability, AFC said, urging IDPH to specify what it plans to spend the money on – so much for prevention, so much for different types of services, etc. – and set goals to measure the effectiveness of the spending.

"The state has never done that," Peller said. "It's really hard to know where the Department's spending this money because they've never put out information on it."

The dollars need to follow the outcomes, AFC officials said in a report on the state budget issued June 16. HIV/AIDS spending should target high-risk populations, AFC said, and set benchmarks to more fully understand which programs are working and which ones aren't.

"The resources have to be focused on the populations most at risk," Peller said. "We think it's really important to be transparent and accountable, and part of that is estimating goals and saying where they are on achieving those outcomes."

Peller said that in the current economic climate, setting specific goals and ways to measure if the state's HIV/AIDS spending is meeting those goals is more important than ever because legislators are looking to spend each scarce state dollar carefully.

"We all need to get our heads around this new era of accountability and transparency," Peller said.

AFC, Feigenholtz and others are working especially hard to protect the AIDS Drug Assistance Program, which provides HIV/AIDS medications to people who otherwise couldn't afford them. That enables many of them to keep working. While IDPH proposed large cuts in ADAP earlier this year, the budget approved by the Legislature ameliorated some of those cuts. AFC is urging the state to take advantage of a Medicaid waiver it's eligible for that would also provide help for some on ADAP.

Still, Peller said, ADAP is likely to have a waiting list for the first time in Illinois.

"I think legislators really feel that they've done their job and there's just no more to give at this point," Peller said.