

Experts Fault Leadership on AIDS

Federal budgets for education, testing, and counseling fall far short of what is needed, and political leadership is lacking, according to a General Accounting Office survey

IF the Senate wanted any justification for raising the budget for AIDS prevention, a report it got from its General Accounting Office (GAO) on 12 August certainly does the trick.

The report, requested by Senator Lawton Chiles (D-FL), chairman of the Senate subcommittee on health appropriations, will probably see a lot of action in the coming battle over AIDS funding.

To produce the briefing paper, GAO interviewed 21 AIDS experts, including 14 state and local authorities. Their consensus: President Reagan's proposed budget of \$247 million for FY 1988 is extremely short of the mark. The experts want the government to increase funding for education, testing, and counseling services by at least another \$365 million next year.

That is no surprise. Among the seven individuals interviewed by GAO for a "nationwide perspective," five served on last year's oft-quoted report on AIDS sponsored by the Institute of Medicine and National Academy of Sciences. That report recommended that by 1990 about \$1 billion should be spent on prevention.

Among the specifics discussed in the GAO report were:

■ **Lack of leadership.** The GAO report states, "Many told us that the perceived lack of federal leadership is at least as troublesome as the estimated shortfalls in the budget." Those experts interviewed by *Science*, however, say there is no lack of leadership at the National Institutes of Health, the Surgeon General's office, and the Centers for Disease Control.

"The lack of leadership refers to the President. And it is not perceived. It is real," says Sheldon Wolff of the Tufts University School of Medicine. Adds Deborah Cotton, clinical director of AIDS at Beth Israel Hospital in Boston: "It's like trying to conduct a war with no interest in the Executive Branch."

■ **More funds to limit the spread of AIDS virus among intravenous drug users.** "If we don't contain the virus in the IV drug community, we don't contain the virus," says Don Des Jarlais of the New York State Division of Substance Abuse Services. Many public health workers believe that IV

drug users may be the chief conduit for transmitting the AIDS virus into the heterosexual population.

Even with 33,000 slots in New York City's methadone and detoxification programs, there are still waiting periods of up to 3 months, reports Des Jarlais, who adds that fear of AIDS is driving more of the city's addicts into treatment centers. Of the 750,000 IV drug users in the country, 200,000 are in New York City, and more than 50% of those tested have been exposed to the AIDS virus.

Des Jarlais says that educational messages do reach the drug-using population. For example, as a marketing device some New York City dealers are including "free" syringes and hypodermic needles with every purchase of heroin. A black market in used needles repackaged as sterile has also cropped up. Possession of needles is restricted in New York.

Reagan's proposed budget calls for \$70 million for education and testing of IV drug users. There are no AIDS funds earmarked for drug treatment, however. Des Jarlais would like to see \$50 million to \$150 million for methadone maintenance and detoxification programs. Says Des Jarlais: "We need to do what we're doing now, and multiply it by ten."

■ **More funds to expand voluntary test-**

ing and counseling services. In Boston, a person seeking an anonymous test today for exposure to the AIDS virus must wait about 10 weeks to get an appointment. Similar waits are reported in other major cities.

The experts told GAO that education campaigns will only increase the strain on the testing and counseling centers as more and more low-risk individuals come in to be assured that they have not been exposed to the AIDS virus. The President's proposed budget is \$92 million for testing and counseling services. The GAO's experts think an additional \$250 million is needed.

■ **More funds and heightened sense of urgency needed for education.** Reagan proposed \$155 million for AIDS education, including funds earmarked for IV drug users, health care workers, and "other high risk groups." Conspicuous by its absence is any reference to homosexual men. Representatives from the American Medical Association and others suggested increasing AIDS education by three to five times over FY 1987 levels, calling for a massive education campaign.

How well the health care community could spend such a surge of funding has been questioned. But, says Wolff, "If we don't start spending money now, when do we?" ■ **WILLIAM BOOTH**

Researcher Flouts Gene-Splicing Rules

An outdoor experiment initiated in June by a Montana State University (MSU) professor is being condemned by industry and government officials as well as environmentalists. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is expected to levy penalties against Gary Strobel, a plant pathologist, who was seeking to test a method for improving the ability of elm trees to resist Dutch elm disease. Strobel developed a strain of the bacterium *Pseudomonas syringae* using recombinant DNA techniques and injected it into trees on the university's campus without obtaining a federal permit to release the organism into the environment.

Industry officials have reacted with alarm to the experiment, fearing that it could lead Congress to impose stricter regulations on such research. Bruce Mackler, general counsel for the Association of Biotechnology Companies, hopes Congress will see Strobel's action as an isolated incident. "The sins of academe should not be placed upon the biotech industry," said Mackler.

Richard Godown, executive director of the Industrial Biotechnology Association, said that the researcher should be penalized severely. "We encourage EPA to throw the book at Gary Strobel." The researcher also could be penalized by the university, the state, the National Science Foundation, and