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CONTACT: Gina Bowers (202) 288-0257

CVS/pharmacy Challenged by Public Health Advocates, Community Leaders to Free the Condoms

Washington, D.C. – Public health advocates challenged CVS/pharmacy today over its policy of keeping condoms in locked cases in CVS stores located in communities of color, which are disproportionately affected by HIV and AIDS. A recent survey of CVS stores showed that in a number of cities across the country, the retail giant was at least three times more likely to lock condoms in communities of color than in majority white areas.

Community leaders outside CVS/pharmacies in communities of color in New York, Los Angeles, Philadelphia and Boston today called the practice discriminatory and a threat to public health. Taken together, hundreds of Valentine cards, signed by CVS/pharmacy shoppers and in an online campaign at CureCVSNow.org, ask the company to reverse its policy and unlock the condoms. Walgreens, CVS's largest national competitor, has a policy against locking up condoms at any of its stores.

Responding to the community's call for change, some CVS/pharmacy locations put a small selection of condoms on display outside the locked cases.

Across the country, community leaders called the CVS practice of locking condom cases disproportionately in minority communities particularly troubling, pointing to studies that show HIV/AIDS is the number one killer of black American women between the ages of 25 and 34, and that the rate of new HIV infections among Latinos is three times the rate of whites. Public health advocates are also criticizing CVS for locked condom cases, saying it is creating a barrier which could decrease condom use.

Community Response

"The practice of locking up condoms in communities of color, where rates of HIV, sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy continue to soar is both short-sighted and dangerous," said Gary J. Bell of Blacks Educating Blacks About Sexual Health Issues (BEBASHI). "We hope CVS will make the necessary changes to unlock their condoms everywhere."

"Locking up condoms leads to a tunnel of secrecy and denial of HIV/AIDS infection. It sends the wrong message about the reality of HIV in our community while it helps keep the issue of HIV/STD's locked up," said Richard Zaldivar, Executive Director, The Wall Las Memorias, a non-profit organization working in the Latino community to create culturally sensitive HIV/AIDS education and prevention.

“Women everywhere should have unrestricted access to condoms and contraceptives. The fact that CVS locks condom cases anywhere is shameful: the fact that the company often does so in minority neighborhoods amounts to nothing less than discrimination and must be stopped,” said Lauren Townsend of the National Organization of Women (NOW).

“The surge in HIV infection rates among young people from ages 13-30 reported by the Centers for Disease Control makes it essential that youth have access to the means to save their lives,” said John Riley, a member of ACT UP/NY.

“Condom use markedly reduces HIV risk, however studies show that stigmatization of condoms or condom-users reduces their use. Drugstores play a unique role as the place where most teens get their condoms, but when they lock their condom displays in poor communities it introduces a dangerously stigmatizing barrier to condom use among youth. ACT UP/NY calls on CVS to promote HIV prevention and unlock their condom displays in every community they serve.”

For more information visit www.CureCVSNow.org

Cure CVS is an initiative by Change to Win and partner organizations to reform the drugstore industry, starting with CVS, the country’s leading provider of prescription drugs and largest drugstore chain. By joining concerned citizen groups with the six million members of Change to Win unions, Cure CVS aims to ensure that CVS provides equal access across all communities and income levels to its stores and services, offers fair and accurate prices, provides quality products and services, protects customers’ privacy and puts quality pharmacy care first.

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