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Local LGBTQ centers scramble for new funding amid threats to federal budgets

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Alamy

A transgender rights rally in Lower Manhattan in 2018.

Community centers that serve LGBTQ New Yorkers are scrambling for new funding sources following a chaotic week that left executives on edge about the status of federal grants that power their programs.

The Trump administration unveiled a plan Monday to halt trillions in federal funds to nonprofits and local governments, creating mayhem for LGBTQ providers that rely on government money. Though the administration abandoned the freeze, providers still anticipate that money for HIV treatment and gender-affirming services – which can include mental health counseling, hormones and surgeries for transgender and nonbinary individuals – will dry up.

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“Any large sums of money for LGBTQ populations, we can be almost certain that that is gone,” said Amy Harclerode, chief executive of the Hetrick-Martin Institute, an East Village-based nonprofit that connects LGBTQ youth with services including housing and mental health care.

Federal funding to LGBTQ organizations and the legality of gender-affirming services have not yet changed under the new administration. But providers said they plan to devise legal strategies and work with state lawmakers and Gov. Kathy Hochul to ensure the state can fill potential funding gaps.

Though an immediate federal funding freeze is off the table, the administration’s pledge to assess wasteful spending on programs that “advance Marxist equity, transgenderism, and green new deal social engineering policies” signaled to many providers that funding for HIV prevention or transgender health care could be at risk.

“They are going to apply this litmus test,” said one nonprofit health care executive who was granted anonymity due to fears of retribution. “Health centers that primarily serve LGBTQ populations are not

likely to pass.”

Threats were amplified after Trump published an executive order Tuesday night that seeks to ban health services for transgender and nonbinary youth including puberty blockers, hormones and surgeries. The order directs the U.S. health secretary to “take appropriate actions” to ensure that people under 19 years old no longer receive such services, including by changing coverage under Medicare and Medicaid – major funding sources for community-based providers.

“Where will the funding stop? Who knows,” said Robert Hayes, president and CEO of the Community Healthcare Network, which operates 14 community health centers in the city that offer HIV prevention and gender-affirming services. Hayes said that roughly 40% of the funding to his organization comes from grants through the Department of Health and Human Services, and he expects to see money earmarked for HIV prevention to disappear.

“It’s almost impossible to do much beyond plan for the worst and carry on as if we are going to be able to continue to meet patients’ needs,” Hayes said.

Harclerode has already sought out private donors to fill potential gaps but said it's highly unlikely that the level of private funding will be enough to meet the needs of the groups poised to lose it. She added that her organization may have to rethink how it raises government money.

“What we’re bracing for is what a lot of organizations had to do in the 90s: make themselves fit into various forms of health care funding by downplaying the community they serve.”

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