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**PRESS RELEASE**

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**Department of Health Recognizes World AIDS Day 2020**

*St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands (November 30, 2020)* - The Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) observes December 1 of each year as World AIDS Day, a day to expand and strengthen worldwide efforts to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS.

The global theme of World AIDS Day is “Global solidarity, shared responsibility.” Nationally, the theme for the 2020 observance is: “Ending the HIV/AIDS Epidemic: Resilience and Impact.” Taken together, we recognize that we will only be able to truly end the HIV epidemic, locally, nationally, and globally, if we engage our collective resilience and empathy. We must work together across borders and agency lines and enact a comprehensive strategy.

World AIDS Day is a day to remember those who have been lost as a result of this serious disease and to give empathy, recognition, and respect to those who live courageously with HIV/AIDS every day. It is essential that we recognize that HIV is treatable, and that modern treatment is very effective. It is also essential that we continue to promote HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention to help prevent further transmission of HIV with proven interventions such as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and syringe services programs (SSPs). We must do this by collaborating with partners locally, nationally and internationally to prevent the spread of HIV.

In accordance with “Ending the HIV Epidemic: A Plan for America,” the goal of the Virgin Islands Department of Health and community-based organizations funded by the federal government is to reduce new infections by 90% by the year 2030. Additionally, as proclaimed in

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July, 2020 by the Governor of the United States Virgin Islands, by 2030 90% of people who know their HIV-positive status will receive treatment, and 90% of people on treatment will have a suppressed viral load. We will work with key policymakers as we make every effort to meet the targets to which they have agreed in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

As of August 12, 2020, the cumulative caseload for the US Virgin Islands was 1348. There were 798 persons living with the HIV infection that were diagnosed in the US Virgin Islands. Five-hundred fifty (550) persons infected with HIV have died. We honor their lives, their struggle, and their courage today.

Because there is no cure for HIV at this time, HIV is considered a chronic disease, with treatment a lifelong process. Lowering the amount of HIV virus in the body with medicines – which for many means one pill a day – greatly promotes the lifespan of a person living with HIV. For someone with an undetectable viral load, there is effectively no chance of sexually transmitting HIV to others, with or without a condom. Hundreds of Virgin Islanders are living healthy with HIV today.

There are several socioeconomic factors that contribute to the HIV epidemic, including income, race, sexual orientation, gender, and gender expression. Furthermore, discrimination and stigma are currently causing people living with HIV/AIDS unnecessary pain worldwide. To end the HIV epidemic by 2030, the U.S. Virgin Islands will continue its strategy of reducing stigma and discrimination, addressing causes of risk, vulnerability, and transmission, using a comprehensive and evidence-based approach, and uniting as a territory.

This World AIDS Day, Tuesday, December 1, 2020, we urge all residents and visitors who are unaware of their status or have not been tested in the past 6 months to get tested for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. Call your preferred testing location today! We have made incredible progress with HIV testing and treatment, but we have a lot of work ahead. Let us continue to work as a local and global community to end HIV stigma and end the HIV epidemic.

We are 340, Getting to Zero!

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