

# Columbus AIDS Task Force and AIDS Resource Center Ohio Announce Merger

May 16, 2011

*Merger to Strengthen HIV/AIDS Services for Ohioans*

*Combined HIV/AIDS Organization Will Serve Majority of Ohio's Counties, Increase Efficiencies and Reach*

Two of Ohio's leading AIDS service organizations (ASOs), AIDS Resource Center Ohio (ARC Ohio) and Columbus AIDS Task Force (CATF), have announced their decision to merge, effective July 1, 2011. This is the largest-ever merger of ASOs in Ohio, and follows a yearlong assessment funded by The Columbus Foundation, The Dayton Foundation, and the Toledo Community Foundation.

In a joint statement, Sam Rinehart and Bobby Thaxton, chairs of ARC Ohio and CATF, respectively, heralded the merger as a "proactive, strategic and sound business decision made by both governing bodies, in whose hands the well-being of our services have been entrusted."

Bill Hardy, director of ARC Ohio for more than 18 years, will serve as CEO of the merged organization, which will retain the name AIDS Resource Center Ohio. CATF's current CEO, Peggy Anderson, LISW, will oversee all programmatic operations for the new organization, which will provide HIV care, testing, prevention and advocacy throughout more than 60 Ohio counties.

The merger creates Ohio's largest ASO, with a budget of \$6 million and a service area covering 70 percent of Ohio. Offices in Columbus, Dayton, Lima, Mansfield, Toledo, Athens, Chillicothe, and Newark will provide linkage to care, financial assistance and supportive services to more than 2,500 HIV-positive Ohioans. Thousands more will be reached with evidence-based prevention and HIV testing.

Both organizations have similar histories, services and budgets, and have faced many of the same challenges. "These are difficult times for the nonprofit sector, ASOs notwithstanding," said Hardy. "Across the U.S. and Ohio, ASOs are struggling to retain services and keep their doors open due to the economic climate and competition for private support. In light of such challenges, it's gratifying to make a decision based on the best of what we can achieve together, rather than the worst of what we fear, apart."

A strong advocate of mission-driven strategic alliances, Hardy pointed out that the merger will create "an organization greater than the sum of its parts, and will position us to achieve a larger mission than either agency could carry out alone. It promotes equitable care, brings together complementary administrative and program expertise, enhances our service capacities, makes the most effective use of precious resources, and strengthens our long-term viability."

Anderson agrees. "CATF and ARC Ohio were already collaborating, and this decision will combine program and administrative expertise to better serve all our clients."

While extensive progress has been made in treating HIV infection, there is still no cure or preventative vaccine. More than 16,400 Ohioans were reported as living with HIV/AIDS as of December 31, 2009, and another 3,200 are presumed infected, but not yet diagnosed. About 1,000 new cases of HIV are identified in Ohio annually.