



The Presidential Candidates on Sex Education, HIV Prevention, and Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs

The U.S. President has the power to fundamentally lead and change our nation's approach to promoting and securing sex education and in reducing disease burdens such as those caused by sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV. The Bush Administration has taken a decidedly backward and anti-science approach to these issues in its war on evidence-based prevention and in its dogged promotion of abstinence-only-until-marriage programs. The next President has an opportunity to reverse this harm. Below are the key positions of the three remaining presidential contenders on the issues of sex education, HIV prevention, and support for a national AIDS strategy. SIECUS believes that knowledge empowers and that in order to take part in the most sacred of democratic rituals—voting—advocates need to know the key positions of the candidates on these important issues so that voters can be fully informed and engaged.

Democratic Candidates

Hillary Clinton

Comprehensive Sexuality Education, Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs

- Senator Clinton is a co-sponsor of the [Prevention First Act](#), which is a package of legislation that seeks to prevent unintended pregnancy and increase access to comprehensive contraceptive services and information. Of her co-sponsorship, the Senator notes that she, “support[s] abstinence-first programs, which send a strong message to young people that they should delay sexual activity,” and notes that she “also support[s] providing them with information about how to protect themselves from unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.”¹
- Senator Clinton says that she “will end the Bush administration's abstinence-only prevention policy, and instead, fund evidence-based HIV/AIDS prevention programs including, but not limited to, abstinence education as part of a comprehensive prevention message.”² She notes that she has “called for redirecting funding from the Community-Based Abstinence Education Program to evidence-based prevention and sex education programs.”³

HIV Prevention

- Senator Clinton supports increasing domestic evidence-based prevention efforts to at least \$1 billion annually.⁴ She says she “will work to give individuals the tools needed to protect themselves against HIV by supporting proven strategies and targeting those efforts to the populations most vulnerable to HIV infection.”⁵
- Senator Clinton will “work to dramatically reduce the number of new HIV infections in this country and around the world. Our current prevention efforts have done little to lower the number of HIV infections, and we need to increase the ability of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to provide outreach, education, and awareness programs to reduce the incidence of HIV.”⁶
- She supports giving “young people age-appropriate information about HIV/AIDS and how to protect themselves against the disease, including by delaying sexual activity.”⁷
- Senator Clinton “will work to target culturally competent prevention efforts towards vulnerable populations that account for a disproportionate number of new infections,” and “will ensure that women, who account for more than one-quarter of all new HIV/AIDS infections in the U.S., have

the knowledge and tools necessary to protect themselves against HIV.”⁸ She “will address the disproportionate burden of HIV/AIDS among minority communities” and “will increase funding for the Minority AIDS Initiative and support the prevention and treatment efforts of minority-run community based organizations.”⁹

National AIDS Strategy

- According to Senator Clinton’s *Plan To Fight HIV/AIDS at Home and Abroad*, she will develop and implement a comprehensive national AIDS strategy. This plan will include “measurable goals, targets, and timelines for increasing evidence-based prevention and expanding effective treatment interventions, so that we can monitor and evaluate our efforts, expand what is working, and correct what is not. This single, comprehensive strategy will allow for better cooperation and more efficient and effective allocation of resources, so that we can stop and reverse the increases in HIV infection among vulnerable populations.”¹⁰

Barak Obama

Comprehensive Sexuality Education, Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs

- Senator Obama supports comprehensive sex education that is age-appropriate.¹¹ He is a co-sponsor of the [*Responsible Education About Life \(REAL\) Act*](#), which would provide funding for comprehensive, medically accurate sexuality education.
- Senator Obama is also a co-sponsor of the [*Prevention First Act*](#), which is a package of legislation that seeks to prevent unintended pregnancy and increase access to comprehensive contraceptive services and information.
- Senator Obama firmly opposes federal funding for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs¹² and has stated that “it’s the right thing to do...to provide age-appropriate sex education, science-based sex education in schools.”¹³
- He supports sex education for younger ages, particularly if it is age-appropriate, and has indicated that his position is based on the fact that age-appropriate comprehensive sex education includes such topics as learning the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touching to educate young children on what to do should they ever be faced with an abusive situation.¹⁴

HIV Prevention

- Senator Obama states that in addition to assuring access to treatment, “we need to increase the focus on preventing new infections.” He notes, “We cannot keep pace with treatment needs if we don’t also focus on prevention. This means pursuing a strategy that relies on sound science and builds on what works.” He supports increasing federal appropriations for science-based, HIV-prevention programs.¹⁵
- At a 2006 World AIDS Day Summit at Saddleback Church in Orange County (CA) Obama stated, “Let me say this loud and clear: I don’t think that we can deny that there is a moral and spiritual component to prevention, that in too many places all over the world where HIV/AIDS is prevalent—including, by the way, right here in the United States—the relationship between men and women, between sexuality and spirituality, has broken down, and needs to be repaired.”¹⁶ Of this speech, Obama noted at a presidential debate that, he is “willing to talk about AIDS at Saddleback Church to evangelicals and talk about why we need to have condom distribution to deal with the scourge of AIDS.”¹⁷

National AIDS Strategy

- According to his *Fighting HIV/AIDS Worldwide* platform, Senator Obama is committed to developing a national HIV/AIDS strategy. Obama has pledged that, “in the first year of his presidency, he will develop and begin to implement a comprehensive national HIV/AIDS strategy that includes all federal agencies. The strategy will be designed to reduce HIV infections, increase access to care, and

reduce HIV-related health disparities. His strategy will include measurable goals, timelines, and accountability mechanisms.”¹⁸

Republican Candidate

John McCain

Comprehensive Sexuality Education, Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs

- Senator McCain has not cosponsored the *Responsible Education About Life (REAL) Act* or the *Prevention First Act*, the two major legislative initiatives in the Senate designed to establish the first-ever dedicated federal support for comprehensive sex education.
- Senator McCain signed a letter in June 2007 to Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee Max Baucus and Ranking Member Charles Grassley supporting a straight-forward reauthorization of the Title V abstinence-only-until-marriage program and the continued distribution of \$50 million dollars to programs that are required to teach only abstinence and marriage promotion and that censor important information about condoms and contraception.¹⁹
- In July 2006, Senator McCain voted against an amendment which would have invested in comprehensive sexuality education and teen pregnancy prevention initiatives, such as after-school programs for at-risk youth.²⁰
- A statement from Senator McCain’s campaign noted that the Senator “strongly opposes efforts by the Democratic-controlled Congress to eliminate abstinence-only sex education classes for school-aged children. Senator McCain believes the correct policy for educating young children on this subject is to promote abstinence as the only safe and responsible alternative. To do otherwise is to send a mixed signal to children that, on the one hand they should not be sexually active, but on the other here is the way to go about it... to teach abstinence to children as it is the only truly safe and responsible policy. He is unequivocally opposed to Democrat-led efforts to eliminate federal funding for abstinence-only education in public schools.”²¹

HIV Prevention and a National AIDS Strategy

- Senator McCain has not yet created a platform on HIV/AIDS nor has he yet pledged support for developing and implementing a national AIDS strategy.

¹ “Candidate Questions Regarding HIV/AIDS,” Planned Parenthood of Greater Iowa, accessed 25 March 2008, <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/greater-iowa/files/GreaterIowa/Clinton_HIV_AIDS_questionnaire.pdf>

² Hillary for President, “Clinton Announces Plan to Fight HIV/AIDS At Home And Abroad,” Press Release published on 27 November 2007, accessed 25 March 2008, <<http://www.hillaryclinton.com/news/release/view/?id=4392>>.

³ Daryl J. Cochrane and Kristin D. Goodwin, “Where Do They Stand?: The Gay Men’s Health Crisis Report on the 2008 Presidential Candidates and HIV/AIDS,” (New York: Gay Men’s Health Crisis, 2007), accessed 20 March 2008, <http://www.gmhc.org/policy/federal/pres_report.pdf>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Hillary for President, “Clinton Announces Plan to Fight HIV/AIDS At Home And Abroad.”

⁶ “Where Do They Stand?: The Gay Men’s Health Crisis Report on the 2008 Presidential Candidates and HIV/AIDS.”

⁷ Hillary for President, “Clinton Announces Plan to Fight HIV/AIDS At Home And Abroad.”

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Hillary for President, “Clinton Announces Plan to Fight HIV/AIDS At Home And Abroad.”

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² “Where Do They Stand?: The Gay Men’s Health Crisis Report on the 2008 Presidential Candidates and HIV/AIDS.”

¹³ “Sex Ed for Kindergartners?,” *ABC News*, accessed 25 March 2008, <<http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/Story?id=3395856&page=2>>.

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Obama for America, “Barak Obama: Fighting HIV/AIDS Worldwide,” accessed 25 March 2008, <<http://www.kaisernetwork.org/election2008/OBAMAFactSheetAIDSFINAL.pdf>>.

¹⁶ “Where Do They Stand?: The Gay Men’s Health Crisis Report on the 2008 Presidential Candidates and HIV/AIDS.”

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Obama for America, “Barak Obama: Fighting HIV/AIDS Worldwide.”

¹⁹ Letter to Chairman Max Baucus and Ranking Member Charles Grassley, 21 June 2007, accessed 28 March 2008, <<http://www.vitter.senate.gov/forms/abstinenceLetter.pdf>>.

²⁰ “U.S. Senate Roll Call Votes 109th Congress - 2nd Session: On the Amendment (Lautenberg Amdt. No. 4689),” accessed 28 March 2008, <http://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll_call_lists/roll_call_vote_cfm.cfm?congress=109&session=2&vote=00214>.

²¹ “John McCain Campaign to Brody File: Eliminating “Abstinence Only” Programs is Wrong,” *The Brody File*, 24 May 2007, accessed 30 March 2008, <<http://www.cbn.com/CBNnews/164102.aspx>>.