“False Information in a Post You Just Shared”: Coming to HIV News Soon?

Could sites like Facebook, Google and Twitter help fight misinformation and end the HIV epidemic?

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How many times have you seen messages on social media about herbs curing HIV, posts spreading the lie that HIV doesn’t cause AIDS or other false information about how HIV is transmitted and wondered: Why are these lies still out here?

If the White House Office of National AIDS Policy has its way, those sorts of posts could soon come with a misinformation label like the ones now reserved for anti-vaccine posts and misinformation about COVID-19. In an interview with POZ, Harold Phillips, the director of the White House Office of National AIDS Policy (a position often referred to as the United States’ “AIDS czar”), said he plans to open conversations with Facebook, Google and other social media platforms as early as the New Year as part of the evolving plan to end the HIV epidemic.

It’s in keeping with the “whole-of-society approach” to the “Ending the HIV Epidemic” plan, which calls for eliminating 90% of new HIV diagnoses by 2030, he said. Recent data suggest it’s needed. GLAAD’s 2021 State of HIV Stigma Study found that the American public fails to understand the basics of modern HIV prevention and treatment.

“Being in this position gives me the ability to think about what strategies we also need from private industry—private and commercial industry, those sectors—to help us in ending the HIV epidemic,” Phillips told POZ.

“With the Googles, the Facebooks of the world, what we really hope to do is bring them together to really help think through the reach that they have into communities and how they can help us with HIV messages: misinformation, putting accurate health information out there and using some of their analytics to see what questions the community has when it comes to HIV and how we as government can help provide accurate information.”

This isn’t a one-off effort. The Biden administration called for such warnings around COVID-19 misinformation in 2020, and this year, the Office of the Surgeon General issued an advisory titled “Confronting Health Misinformation.” According to a Reuters report, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki in July 2021 called out Facebook specifically for not shutting down the 12 users who shared

65% of anti-vaccine information on the site.

Facebook, Google, Twitter and other social media platforms now warn users and posters when they are about to share or read information that is false when it comes to COVID-19.

In addition to bringing online information platforms together, Phillips said the administration, with the guidance of the new President's Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS, plans to release an updated National HIV/AIDS Strategy by World AIDS Day, observed December 1.

"As federal partners come together, we're thinking about what strategies we can include in this new national strategy that might provide an opening for private industry in the private sector to join us in this effort," Phillips told POZ.

Click here to read more news about fighting HIV stigma and the National HIV/AIDS Strategy.

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