

# The Philadelphia Inquirer

Thursday, Dec. 7, 1989 The Philadelphia Inquirer 21-A

## AIDS panel warns of complacency, 'unresponsive' health-care system

By Charles Green  
*Inquirer Washington Bureau*

WASHINGTON — A new congressional commission on AIDS warned yesterday that there was a dangerous complacency toward the disease and called on President Bush to provide more leadership before the epidemic worsens in the 1990s.

The first report by the National Commission on AIDS, submitted to Bush eight months early to highlight the urgency of the problem, said the nation's health-care system was "singularly unresponsive" to patients infected with the AIDS virus. It criticized in particular the government's Medicaid program for the poor.

There is no requirement, for instance, that Medicaid make the life-prolonging drug AZT available to AIDS patients, the report said.

The 15-member commission took office in August under a 1988 law that created an independent body of health experts and government officials to advise Congress and the President on AIDS.

David E. Rogers, vice chairman of the commission and professor of medicine at the New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center, said the panel had not been due to deliver its first report to Bush until August.

"The prime message is we have a real crisis," Rogers said. "It's crippling the health systems of a number of major cities, and it needs federal as well as state and local attention." He said New York, San Francisco, Houston and Newark, N.J., were facing the most serious problems.

While Rogers said the "court's out stull" about the Bush administra-

tion's actions to deal with the epidemic, the commission did criticize the administration for not addressing AIDS as part of its national drug strategy. Statistics showed that about 30 percent of AIDS cases in 1988 were linked to intravenous drug use.

A spokesman for the commission said that the three cabinet-level members on the panel — Defense Secretary Dick Cheney, Veterans Secretary Edward J. Derwinski and Health and Human Services Secretary Louis W. Sullivan — did not register objections to the report.

The report predicted that AIDS would be far worse in the 1990s than it had been in the 1980s and likely would claim an additional 200,000 lives in the next four years. As of Oct. 31, AIDS had caused 66,493 deaths, according to the Centers for Disease Control. AIDS is a fatal disease that attacks the immune system.

"In increasing numbers, these new cases will be women and children," the report said.

While medical advances in treating the AIDS virus are encouraging, the "breakthroughs mean little" unless the nation's health-care system makes them available to people in need, the report said.

Almost one-quarter of AIDS patients have no health insurance, the report said, and those who are covered by Medicaid often get little help.

For instance, the report said that doctors in New York City who saw a new AIDS patient during an office visit received only \$7 in compensation from Medicaid, compared with \$78 from Blue Cross and \$80 from Medicare, the government's health program for the elderly.

The report recommended increased spending on Medicaid and said the federal government must develop a national policy and a "national voice" on AIDS.