

Good afternoon, and thank you for being here today. We have made great gains as a nation in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

The fact that we are here today focusing on older Americans with HIV/AIDS represents progress. What was once a death sentence is now a disease that, while still devastating, there are strategies to manage.

Unlike three decades ago, today, thirty-one percent of those with HIV/AIDS are over the age of 50, and it is estimated that by the year 2015, half of all of those living with HIV will have hit such a milestone.

The rate of those aging with HIV/AIDS is even higher in my home state of Florida -- 39% of those with the disease are over the age of 50 right now.

This so-called "graying" of HIV/AIDS comes with a need to refocus our work on the new challenges brought forth by this changing epidemic.

I want to reaffirm again that aging with HIV/AIDS is not a cure. We must still strive to find a cure for AIDS.

But, our work for a cure should take into account the fact that any such drug or vaccine will miss half an epidemic if it is not tested and proven effective for an elderly population.

Those that are aging with HIV/AIDS often suffer from accelerated aging.

And, many conditions that often occur in the elderly, like diabetes and Alzheimer's, have new implications for our aging HIV/AIDS population.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about how our research dollars contribute to our understanding of how to treat AIDS in the context of those other diseases that often occur in the elderly.

Finally, I want to hear from our witnesses about providing HIV services and support to seniors. Are our programs that train providers, and offer housing and assistance with medication costs prepared for an aging population?

We have made great strides in the battle against HIV/AIDS, but the battleground has changed, and I want to know what this committee, and the nation as a whole, can do to meet the needs of older Americans suffering from this devastating disease.

I want to thank our witnesses, and as always, my partner on this committee, Senator Susan Collins, and all the members of the committee here today joining me for an informative discussion about the aging epidemic of HIV/AIDS.