

AT RISK

Addressing Sexual Health & HIV Prevention for Those Who Need It the Most




AMIDA CARE



BE YOURSELF

The health plan **for individuals**

When you're part of the Amida Care community, you can be yourself. We see each member as a whole person, with physical, emotional, and social needs. We want to help you improve your health and live your most authentic, best life.


AMIDA CARE
ABOVE AND BEYOND FOR YOU
Medicaid Health Plan

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New Horizons

Preventive Sexual Health Care for HIV-Negative Individuals Will Help End the Epidemic

by Doug Wirth, President and CEO, Amida Care

Thanks to the hard work of health care providers and community advocates and the leadership of Governor Andrew Cuomo, New York State, once the epicenter of the AIDS epidemic, has made great strides since 2015, when our Blueprint to End the Epidemic by 2020 was launched. New HIV diagnoses have dropped yearly, and just-released 2017 data for New York City shows that they fell to 2,157, a record low.

Recently, however, the reduction rate has slowed down, and new HIV diagnoses among young gay and bisexual men

of color, women of color, and transgender individuals remain high. Without culturally competent and accessible sexual health care and services targeting these particular New Yorkers, health disparity gaps could widen, and the rates of HIV transmission are unlikely to drop low enough to end the epidemic in these communities.

Special Needs Plans (SNPs) like Amida Care are uniquely positioned to serve these communities. In 2017, SNPs were given authority by New York State to serve transgender people regardless of their HIV status. This change has had a positive impact on the

health and quality of life for many transgender individuals. Expanding SNP eligibility to include other populations at higher risk for acquiring HIV will help us end the epidemic, save money on long-term health care costs, and foster a healthier New York.

At Amida Care, we believe that ending the epidemic is possible when communities, health organizations, and government work together in the spirit of service, mutual respect, and commitment to provide care that meets individual needs, and celebrates each of us as we are.

Young men of color who have sex with men, women of color, and HIV-negative partners in couples of mixed HIV status all stand to greatly benefit from further SNP eligibility expansion in our state.

"I've heard that Amida Care seeks to open up coverage for preventive care to women of color who are HIV-negative but in a higher risk group. This is an awesome idea!"

— Michelle Lopez, HIV Treatment Works Campaign Coordinator

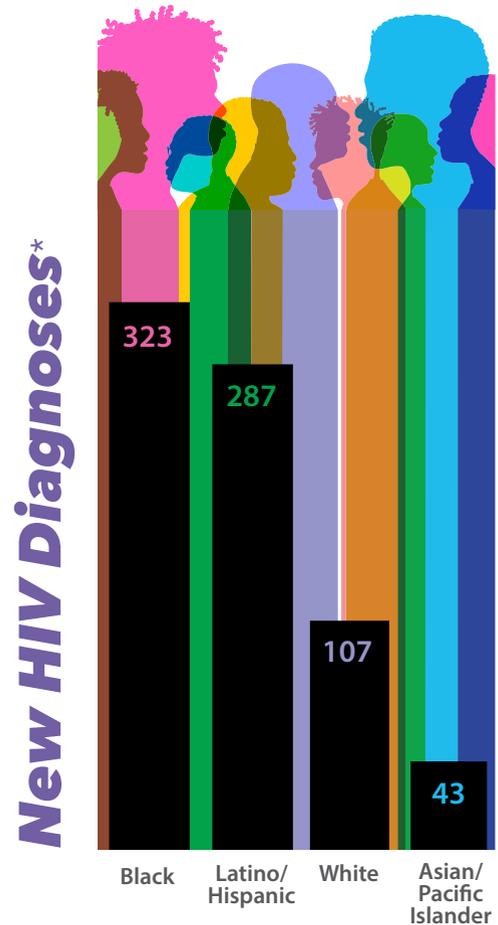
LET'S OVERCOME



YOUNG & HOT

Gay and Bisexual Men of Color

Young men of color who have sex with men (MSM) are at a higher risk of getting HIV than the general population. Pre- and post-exposure prophylaxes (PrEP and PEP) can reduce that risk when taken as prescribed. Unfortunately, many young MSM don't know about these treatment options — or don't have access to them.



*Number of New HIV Diagnoses among Men 13 to 29 in NYC, 2017

"OF ALL THE LABELS WITHIN MY OWN BLACK COMMUNITY, 'GAY' SEEMS TO BE DEEMED THE WORST. WALKING INTO A STORE HAND IN HAND WITH MY LOVER AND HAVING PEOPLE LOOK AT ME IN SHOCK AS IF I DIDN'T BELONG HAS BECOME THE NORM IN MY WORLD. AS A RESULT, I HAVE LEARNED TO BE UNAPOLOGETICALLY ME AND TO GET MY LICKS IN BY BEING SUCCESSFUL."

– Regnarian Jenkins, Community Ambassador, Amida Care

YOUNG & HOT

Gay and Bisexual Men of Color

We need to educate young Black and Latino men about PrEP, PEP, condom use, and sexual health in general, in a sex-positive, pleasure-centered environment. We also need to provide health services right in the community, such as in a local health clinic.

"I WAS RAPED IN 2006. AS A RESULT, I BECAME HIV+ AND GOT SYPHILIS. SHAME KEPT ME QUIET. IT TOOK ME SIX MONTHS TO MUSTER THE COURAGE TO REPORT IT, AND ONLY BECAUSE I GOT VERY SICK."

– Jackie Johnson
Office Assistant, Amida Care

"NOT HAVING A PLACE OR A BED TO CALL MY OWN HAS BEEN A STRUGGLE I KNOW ALL TOO WELL. WITHOUT A PLACE TO STAY, NOT ONLY WAS I NOT WORRIED ABOUT TAKING CARE OF MYSELF MEDICALLY, BUT I HAD LOW SELF-ESTEEM THAT CAUSED ME TO LET OTHERS WALK ALL OVER ME. I AM A PRODUCT OF MY COMMUNITY AND BECAUSE OF THE STRENGTH OF THE STREETS, I LEARNED TO MAKE CONNECTIONS WHO HELP ME, NOW THAT I HAVE A PLACE TO CALL HOME."

–Regnarian Jenkins
Community Ambassador, Amida Care



LET'S CELEBRATE



creativity
resilience
individuality
independence
collaboration
energy
fractured
practices
organizational
diversity

LET'S OVERCOME



poverty

inequality

violence

gender

sexism

racism

Strong & Beautiful Women of Color

The vast majority of women who are newly diagnosed with HIV in NYC and statewide are women of color. It's crucially important to give this community access to preventive sexual health care, as we work to end the epidemic in our state. Too often, a focus on working and taking care of their children keeps women of color from prioritizing their own health care needs.

"TOO MANY WOMEN OF COLOR THINK HEALTH CARE JUST MEANS 'SICK CARE.' WHEN I GET SICK, THEN I GET CARE. BUT THAT'S NOT THE PURPOSE OF HEALTH CARE. – Michelle Lopez
HIV Treatment Works Campaign Coordinator



In NYC, Black women and Latinas comprised over 90% of new HIV diagnoses among women in 2016, the latest year for which data has been released.

Strong & Beautiful Women of Color

"CYCLES PLAY OUT IN FAMILIES, AND I HAVE TO BREAK THE CYCLE IN MY FAMILY. AFTER MY HIV DIAGNOSIS, I REALIZED WHAT I HAVE TO DO TO LIVE MY BEST."

– Valerie Reyes-Jimenez
Community Organizer, Housing Works

Since research clearly shows that women of color in New York are at a much higher risk of being diagnosed with HIV than their white counterparts, providing this community with greater access to PrEP, PEP, and sexual health care in general will help bring a paradigm shift and greatly benefit everyone.



"IF WOMEN LEARNED AND UNDERSTOOD WHAT PREVENTATIVE SEXUAL HEALTH CARE IS AND WHY WE NEED IT, WE WOULD HAVE BETTER OUTCOMES."

– Michelle Lopez
HIV Treatment Works Campaign Coordinator

LET'S CELEBRATE



inner strength beauty
assertive confidence
resilient
resourceful sexy power
Self-Reliant

LET'S OVERCOME

unemployment
poverty
survival
homelessness
sex

transphobia
stigma
discrimination
substance abuse
insensitivity
violence
stigma



Being Ourselves

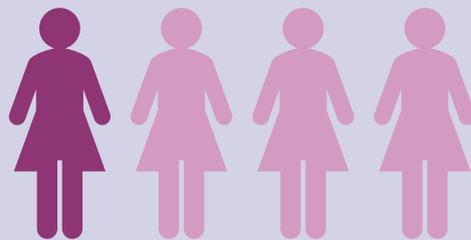
Transgender Women of Color

There is no ending the epidemic in New York without stopping HIV in the transgender community, who are disproportionately affected and at greater risk, particularly among people of color. Amida Care and other Special Needs Health Plans (SNPs) in our state are on the front lines of this battle, providing culturally competent sexual health care — including access to PEP and PrEP — to transgender women and men regardless of HIV status.

"AS WE MAKE STRIDES TOWARD ATTAINING HUMAN RIGHTS, EMPLOYMENT, SECURE HOUSING, AND MORE, OUR COMMUNITY NEEDS TO KEEP ESTABLISHING OUR OWN TRANS-LED ORGANIZATIONS, TO CREATE MORE SAFE SPACES FOR OUR COMMUNITY TO GROW AND EXCEL."

– Cristina Herrera, CEO, Translatinx Network

25%



Current estimates by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) show about 25% of transgender women in the United States are living with HIV.

"DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING SAID: 'INJUSTICE ANYWHERE IS A THREAT TO JUSTICE EVERYWHERE,' BUT UNFORTUNATELY THIS IS NOT THE CASE WHEN IT COMES TO VIOLENCE AGAINST OUR COMMUNITY. WE'RE EXPECTED TO BE STRONG AND RESILIENT WHEN ALL WE WANT TO DO IS LIVE AND THRIVE, LIKE EVERYONE ELSE IN SOCIETY."

– Octavia Lewis
Community Ambassador, Amida Care



Being Ourselves

Transgender Women of Color

"I AM A SURVIVOR, AND HIV IS NOT ME - IT'S JUST A PART OF ME. I'M GLAD WHEN I SEE PEOPLE TALK ABOUT THEIR STATUS OPENLY AND FREELY. THEY DON'T ALLOW STIGMA TO CONTROL THEM. THEY DON'T ALLOW WHAT OTHER PEOPLE THINK TO TAKE UP SPACE IN THEIR MINDS."

– Octavia Lewis
Community Ambassador
Amida Care

"TO THOSE WHO ARE SEX WORKERS, I SPREAD THE MESSAGE: 'I HAVE BEEN THERE TOO, AND BEYOND. THERE'S A WHOLE NEW LIFE WAITING FOR YOU!'"

– Monique Mackey
Community Health Outreach Worker
Amida Care

"OUR TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY FACES MANY CHALLENGES IN THIS NEW ERA, WITH OUR RIGHTS AND PROTECTIONS AT RISK OF BEING TAKEN AWAY. WE NEED HELP AND RESOURCES TO ACCESS EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES, AS WELL AS HIV- AND TRANSITION-RELATED CARE." – Cristina Herrera
CEO, Translatinx Network

LET'S CELEBRATE

SMARTS

Resiliency
leadership

adaptability

talent

community

Self-Awareness
courage



Young and in Love



Mixed HIV Status Couple

"The love of your life can be standing right in front of you, and you would not know because you're not being honest with your status." - LEO



Wanston Williams, 29 (HIV+) & Leo Williams, 34

How did you meet?

LEO: We have been together for six years. We got married the day gay marriage became legal nationwide: June 26, 2015. We actually met on Myspace in 2010, when I was Mr. Gay New Jersey, a spokesperson to raise money for Beacon Light Fund, a non-profit that helps people with HIV/AIDS.

What are the biggest challenges facing couples of mixed HIV status?

WANSTON: Many people don't want to be with someone who has HIV because they don't want to take care of the person, or they think the person is going to die on them. They think people with HIV should live alone or date someone who also has HIV.

LEO: People need to stop judging each other and be honest because without honesty, you have nothing. People need to educate themselves more to HIV/AIDS and STD/STIs {sexually transmitted diseases/infections}. The love of your life can be standing right in front of you, and you would not know because you're not being honest with your status, and you miss out on a great opportunity to meet somebody special...

When Wanston and I met, he was very open with me about his status. That let me know I can trust him, so whatever obstacles come up in the future, we can face them together, such as changing his medication or having an asthma attack. I want to end this by saying that knowledge is power. Education is the key. Be honest because the love of your life is waiting for you.

What role does HIV prevention, such as condoms, PrEP or PEP (pre- or post-exposure prophylaxes) play in your relationship? Does it have a positive effect?

LEO: HIV prevention plays a big role in our life and marriage. I have been on PrEP for about two years. The positive effect of it is that we both want to stay healthy and have safe sex.

Are you undetectable for HIV? If so, what role does being undetectable play in your relationship and HIV prevention?

WANSTON: Yes, I have been undetectable for five years. Now we sit and talk about having safer and better sex so we can both be safe and healthy and love each other. . . . When my Leo and I first got together, the first thing he said was that we need to go get tested. That's when I told him I have HIV. Then he said: 'Ok, are you taking care of yourself?' and I said, 'Yes, I am.' . . . So yes, I have to stay healthy because I have someone to live for that loves and cares for me like I do.

Please talk about when you joined Amida Care and how you became a health educator.

WANSTON: I have been with Amida Care since I found out I have HIV in 2013. . . . I have also become a health educator and prevention advocate. I have always liked helping people who are living with HIV and making sure they get the services they need. . . . I did a training for peer educators at GMHC. . . . Currently, I am MR. HOUSING IS HEALTHCARE, a brand ambassador for the Princess Janae Place, a non-profit housing referral agency. I help people find housing and get those with HIV on HIV/AIDS Services Administration (HASA) and Human Resources Administration (HRA).

"I have been undetectable for five years. Now we sit and talk about having safer and better sex so we can both be safe and healthy and love each other."

HIV+  HIV-



Love IN THE CITY

“At first, we practiced safe sex using condoms while Sabastian spoke to his medical provider and got on PrEP. Since then we’ve been trying to have children together, so we are both great examples of U=U and PrEP care.” – Lailani

Mixed HIV Status Couple

What are the biggest challenges you face as a mixed HIV status couple?

LAILANI: The challenges: 1) people assuming that both of us are HIV-positive, and 2) finding knowledgeable medical professionals who provide comprehensive care that is culturally competent.

SABASTIAN: As a transgender man, I often get treated or referred to as a gay man, which I’m not!

What role does HIV prevention, such as condoms, PrEP or PEP (pre-or post-exposure prophylaxes) play in your relationship? Does it have a positive effect?

LAILANI: At first, we practiced safe sex using condoms while Sabastian spoke to his medical provider and got on PrEP. Since then we’ve been trying to have children together, so we are both great examples of Undetectable=Untransmittable (U=U) and PrEP care.





"I take one pill a day to stay alive, and share my story and my truth."
- Lailani

SABASTIAN: PrEP plays a major role in ensuring that I stay HIV-negative. It has a positive effect as long as we both keep an open line of communication and remain monogamous, because PrEP works, but it only protects you from HIV. It's also important to keep up with lab tests.

What role does being undetectable play in your relationship and HIV prevention?

LAILANI: I take my medication to stay undetectable, not just because I want to live but because I love my husband and am thinking of our future children.

Does it have a positive effect on the relationship?

LAILANI: Mine is simply a medical diagnosis. I take one pill a day to stay alive, and share my story and my truth.

Sabastian Croy, 47 & Lailani Muniz, 35, (HIV+)



A New Integrated Approach to End the AIDS Epidemic



Since the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, for many years the only approach to preventing HIV while being sexually active was oral sex or the use of condoms for anal and vaginal penetration. Nowadays, considering the fact that HIV+ individuals who are virally suppressed or undetectable cannot transmit HIV, the availability of PrEP and PEP enables us to implement a new, integrated approach to HIV prevention that has been proven

Condoms

Condoms are effective at preventing HIV and STIs (sexually transmitted infections), when used correctly and consistently, but doing so can be a challenge for many sexually active people.

PrEP

PrEP, or pre-exposure prophylaxis, is a highly effective anti-HIV medication that – if taken daily – has been shown to be over 90% effective in lowering the risk of HIV.

to significantly reduce the number of new HIV infections.

New diagnoses have declined considerably among white New Yorkers, but this improvement has not yet been achieved in the Latino and Black communities. Historically, both communities face multiple barriers to accessing quality health care, using PrEP, PEP and trying to become and stay undetectable.



PEP

PEP, or post-exposure prophylaxis, works somewhat like a “morning-after pill” to prevent HIV infection. If administered correctly and taken daily for 28 days, PEP is effective in preventing HIV transmission.

U=U

Undetectable =
Untransmittable

When supported by high-quality primary care for HIV and other services to address their needs, individuals who are undetectable or virally suppressed do not transmit HIV through sex.



Help Wanted

Jobs for Those at Risk of HIV

"We've learned that addressing the impact and risks of HIV requires more than simply providing access to meds and health care. These days, more programs help people not just to survive, but to thrive," says Mark Misrok, MS Ed, co-founder and Board President of the National Working Positive Coalition.

New Yorkers at greater risk of new HIV transmissions need more job opportunities and have experienced unequal access to economic and employment opportunities in NYC and statewide. These barriers, seldom discussed, need more attention.

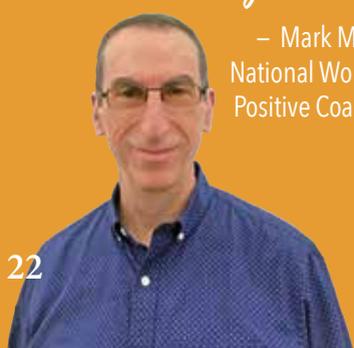
Amida Care offers its members free vocational training through its Workforce Initiative Network (WIN) program, in partnership with Housing Works and The Alliance for Positive Change. Geared toward peer work in the HIV health care community, WIN trains members in job readiness skills to re-enter the workforce and become New York State-certified peers. Those who complete the WIN program may go on to work as health navigators, Community Health Outreach Workers (CHOWs), and administrative assistants.

"Those in communities most at risk for HIV are confronting many kinds of discrimination and other obstacles to quality education and employment. Unmet employment needs connect directly to a range of physical and mental health risks, including HIV," Mark says. "Expanding access to employment supports is an essential investment in the health and well-being of all. Such efforts also help advance New York State's pioneering goal to End the Epidemic by 2020."

Too many New Yorkers most at risk of HIV, including men of color who have sex with men (MSM), women of color, and people of transgender experience, feel trapped in poverty, with limited options to build economically secure futures. Getting help to land desirable jobs may be the best way for them to escape poverty, build financial security, and improve their quality of life.

"Unmet employment needs connect directly to a range of physical and mental health risks, including HIV."

– Mark Misrok
National Working Positive Coalition



HOUSING IS TREATMENT

For New Yorkers with HIV, housing is health care. A stable place to live often leads to becoming undetectable—meaning virally suppressed. Housing instability and homelessness are significant barriers to health care access. Research indicates a close correlation between housing problems and detectable viral loads—and shows that lack of secure housing is a risk factor for HIV transmission.

In 2016, NYC became the world's first jurisdiction to guarantee stable, affordable housing for every low-income person living with HIV (PLWH). NYC and our state have long recognized the findings of a large body of research that shows housing intervention is a key factor in helping PLWH to access health care, benefit from life-saving antiretroviral therapy, and reduce the risk of ongoing HIV transmission.

Housing support saves lives. As part of its commitment to members, Amida Care offers housing referrals among its services.

“Ending the epidemic requires that people living with HIV and communities at elevated risk have access to stable, affordable housing. It has been shown to improve viral suppression and overall health. Housing is health care.”

— Lyndel Urbano
Director, Public Policy & Government Relations, Amida Care





CALL TO ACTION

by **Lyndel Urbano**, Director,
Public Policy & Government Relations,
Amida Care

To end the HIV epidemic in New York City and statewide, we must face the uncomfortable truth that HIV does not affect all New Yorkers equally. It has a greater impact on communities that are marginalized socially, sexually, or economically. Gay and bisexual men of color, women of color, and transgender people are disproportionately affected. Unfortunately, they do not have equal access to resources and tools that would protect their health.

One example of this disparity is the fact that most people who are on PEP or PrEP are white men who have sex with men (MSM), yet most new HIV diagnoses are among gay and bisexual men of color and women of color. We must close this gap.

Valuing communities at elevated risk for HIV and empowering them to make health decisions on their own terms would help break this cycle of inequality. Being black, Latino, transgender, a woman, gay or bisexual, or a person who loves someone whose HIV status differs from one's own should not mean that one is destined to acquire HIV or to make uninformed decisions about sexual health.

Being empowered to deal with HIV comes through access to PrEP and PEP, HIV testing and treatment, employment, stable housing, and secure healthy meals. These resources would improve health outcomes for communities at elevated risk for HIV. Linking people with the care, treatment, and supportive services they need would help those who are living with HIV to achieve undetectable viral loads, while also helping to prevent HIV-negative people from acquiring HIV. Ultimately, these actions will benefit overall community health statewide.

Avoidable emergency room visits, extended hospital stays, and uncompensated care are very costly to taxpayers. Every new HIV infection costs over \$435,000 for lifetime treatment. Since 2008, Amida Care has saved New York State more than \$150 million by getting members virally suppressed and into appropriate care.

To gain these benefits, New York State and local governments must double down on their financial support and act to provide equitable access to care, treatment, and supportive services for communities at elevated risk for HIV.

What Can You Do?

Ask your local and state elected officials to fund equitable access to care, treatment and supportive services for communities at risk for HIV.

Use this link below:
www.tinyurl.com/AtRiskMagazine

WE MUST FACE THE UNCOMFORTABLE

TRUTH THAT HIV DOES NOT AFFECT

ALL NEW YORKERS EQUALLY

