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New York City Council-Funded Program Creates Jobs for New Yorkers Living with HIV

*Amida Care's Innovator Employment Project Helps Individuals Living with HIV Transition into
the Workforce*

New York, NY (May 2, 2018) - [Amida Care](#), New York's largest Medicaid Special Needs Health Plan (SNP), is approaching two years of success with the Innovator Employment Project, which is made possible with funding from New York City Council. The Innovator Employment Project enables job placements to be made at community health care providers for individuals living with HIV. Amida Care specializes in providing comprehensive coverage and coordinated care to New Yorkers living with chronic conditions, including HIV.

The goals of the project are to empower health care consumers as workers and to demonstrate to community providers that they too benefit when they employ people living with HIV. Workers gain critical training, work experience and technical skills needed to gain and keep living-wage jobs. In 2017, eight consumer (peer) workers were hired by community providers through the project. In total, the consumer workers served about 135 clients, and their work resulted in \$157,170 in wages earned at the community health care sites. The Innovator Employment Project expanded in 2018 and currently employs 18 consumer workers at six community health care sites, and total wages earned are projected to exceed \$350,000.

"The Innovator Employment Project is allowing me to develop my skills while helping others," said Kerry Jackson, who is enrolled in the Innovator Employment Project at the Morris Heights Health Center. "Thanks to this program, I have a job I am passionate about, where I can use my own life experience of living for over thirty-five years with HIV to help others get the care they need. I wish I was linked to a peer when I first received my HIV-positive diagnosis."

"Many of the peers enrolled in the Innovator Employment Project have struggled to hold down jobs that would allow them to support themselves while getting the care they need to live healthy lives," said Diana Mendez, peer supervisor at the Morris Heights Health Center. "It is amazing to see them grow their confidence, develop their skills, and use their experience to help get others living with HIV into care. This program is a win for the peers, a win for health care providers, and a win for New Yorkers living with HIV."

“Having a living-wage job is key to staying healthy and integral to Ending the HIV/AIDS Epidemic. When people living with HIV are working, they are more likely to take care of themselves, monitor their health, keep medical appointments, and take their medications,” said Doug Wirth, President and CEO of Amida Care. “By supporting this project, the Council is investing in the overall health of New Yorkers living with HIV, helping them gain the experience and build the skills they need to be successful in the workforce. In turn, these individuals are able to use their life experience to reach others who are at risk of contracting HIV, connect newly diagnosed people to care, and help more people become virally suppressed, which reduces the rate of new infections. This is crucial to ensuring these individuals get the care they need to live healthy, productive lives.”

The Innovator Employment Project is funded through the New York City Council’s End the Epidemic initiative, which contributes to New York State’s goal to end the HIV/AIDS epidemic by 2020. Through the program, consumer workers are matched with health care providers, where they apply their lived experiences to support others and improve care. This innovative approach produces Medicaid cost savings by preventing more intensive and expensive care, including emergency room visits and hospitalizations. The Council funding offsets 50% of the costs of hiring new consumer workers and 25% of the costs of retaining these employees for their second year of employment. Community health centers invest funds to employ peer workers, which is matched by the Council funding. Council funding also supports the provision of technical training to the consumer workers as well as the delivery of technical assistance to the health centers around consumer workforce development.

About Amida Care

Amida Care Inc. is a not-for-profit health plan that specializes in providing comprehensive health coverage and coordinated care to New Yorkers with chronic conditions, including HIV and behavioral health disorders, and people who are of transgender experience or homeless (regardless of HIV status). Amida Care has a wide network of health care providers throughout New York City and is the largest Medicaid Special Needs Health Plan (SNP) in New York State. For more information, visit www.amidacareny.org.