



For Immediate Release

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Amida Care and NEW Pride Agenda Host “All About PrEP” Town Hall on HIV Prevention

Interactive virtual discussion featured Ahmed Mohamed of NEW Pride Agenda, Alister Rubenstein of Amida Care, Jako Douglas-Borren of Brooklyn Community Pride Center, Dr. Jesi Ramone of BMS Family Health and Wellness Centers, and Jawanza Williams of VOCAL NY

New York, NY (January 14, 2021) – On Wednesday, January 13, Amida Care, New York’s largest nonprofit Medicaid Special Needs Health Plan (SNP) designed for New Yorkers affected by HIV, co-hosted a town hall event with NEW Pride Agenda, a nonprofit LGBTQ advocacy organization that works to promote LGBTQ rights in New York State, to discuss pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), which is proven to reduce the risk of getting HIV from sex by 99% when taken daily. Entitled “[All About PrEP](#),” the virtual town hall included a panel discussion featuring experts from HIV and LGBTQ service organizations in Brooklyn.

Speakers spoke of the benefits of PrEP uptake, common challenges in accessing PrEP, the importance of PrEP advocacy in underserved communities, myths and misconceptions about PrEP, and how HIV services have been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“This past year has been particularly challenging, given the pandemic, as organizations have had to relearn and reorganize their services on the fly,” said **Ahmed Mohamed**, Civic Engagement and Community Organizer at NEW Pride Agenda, and moderator of the discussion. Mohamed emphasized the adaptations activists have made despite these challenges, noting “our communities are organized to affect change this new year.”

From Mohamed’s introductory remarks onward, PrEP outreach to communities who need it most was a common point of emphasis. “PrEP is usually one pill a day, once a day, every day...and it’s highly effective for the people who take it,” said **Alister Rubenstein**, Transgender Program Coordinator at Amida Care. “We’re trying to get information about PrEP out there, and gearing our educational campaigns to dispel some of the misinformation,” Rubenstein added, highlighting Amida Care’s work in the transgender community. “You have to create a space that trans people want to enter,” Rubenstein said.

“Currently there are an estimated 1.2 million Americans who are eligible and would likely benefit from PrEP...only 18% are estimated to be on PrEP,” said **Dr. Jesi Ramone**, Associate Medical Director at BMS Family Health and Wellness Centers. “There are [health] plans,

including Amida Care, that not only cover, but proactively educate their communities about PrEP and the places they can get PrEP.”

“I want to take a step back and ... think more about the range of social determinants of health that we have to consider when talking about PrEP,” said **Jwanza Williams**, Director of Organizing at VOCAL NY. “Any conversation about expanding the use of PrEP and making sure that all the people who need access to PrEP have access to it, means that we also need to be talking about expanding access to comprehensive health care, including mental health care.” Williams stressed that this need remains particularly urgent in communities of color, who have also been disproportionately affected by both the HIV epidemic and the COVID-19 pandemic.

“In reaching people of color, I also think it’s important that everyone can feel that relatability,” said **Jako Douglas-Borren**, Director of Programs at Brooklyn Community Pride Center, “It’s important that these services are provided by local organizations, by organizations that are led by people of color, that have a really deep understanding of their own communities.”

The town hall concluded with an interactive quiz, which addressed common misconceptions about PrEP. During the quiz, panelists dispelled harmful myths, including that PrEP causes promiscuity, and that PrEP interferes with hormone therapy.

This Brooklyn-focused event is the first of a series of Amida Care and NEW Pride Agenda PrEP Town Halls, which will be based in neighborhoods with disproportionate rates of HIV. Watch the event here: https://youtu.be/Ok_a2Pvrcyk.

Amida Care Inc. is a not-for-profit health plan that specializes in providing comprehensive health coverage and coordinated care to New Yorkers with complex 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.

NEW Pride Agenda is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization whose mission is to set and frame the new policy agenda and focus areas for LGBTQIA rights in the State of New York. For more information, visit <https://newprideagenda.org>.