



**For Immediate Release**

Media Contact: Shakira Croce, Assistant Director of Communications  
[scroce@amidacareny.org](mailto:scroce@amidacareny.org), (646) 757-7052

## **Amida Care Calls on New York State to Expand Access to Medicaid Special Needs Health Plans**

*Expanded access to SNPs is crucial to reach the State's goal of ending the HIV/AIDS epidemic by 2020*

New York, NY (December 19, 2018) – [Amida Care](#), New York's largest not-for-profit Medicaid Special Needs Health Plan (SNP), is calling on the New York State Department of Health (DOH) and the AIDS Institute to use their existing authority to allow SNPs to expand eligibility to communities at higher risk for HIV by April 2019. This will help the state meet its goal of Ending the HIV/AIDS Epidemic (ETE) by 2020. SNPs have expertise in working with populations living with and at higher risk for HIV and are uniquely qualified to provide comprehensive coverage, coordinated care, and sexual health services through their networks of health care providers and specialists.

The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene recently released [data](#) showing that new HIV diagnoses were down to a record low 2,157 in 2017 – a 5.4% drop from the previous year. While the progress is encouraging, the rate of reduction is slowing down, and the State must do more to reach the goal of having fewer than 750 new infections per year by 2020.

“New York, once the epicenter of the AIDS crisis, has made great strides towards ending the epidemic,” said Doug Wirth, President and CEO of Amida Care. “However, if we’re to meet our goal by 2020, we need to double down on our efforts. We know what works. It’s time for the State to expand eligibility to SNPs for populations at higher risk for acquiring HIV so we can further reduce new infections and end the epidemic once and for all.”

The state’s ETE Blueprint lists men who have sex with men (MSM), people of transgender experience, women of color, sero-discordant couples (where one partner is HIV-positive and one partner is HIV-negative), and injection drug users as populations at higher risk for HIV. Of these populations, only HIV-negative transgender individuals are currently eligible to enroll in SNPs.

There is an urgent need to enhance services available to people in communities at higher

risk of infection. Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Harlem are disproportionately impacted by the epidemic. In Brooklyn, there are 30,239 people living with HIV, and there were 640 new HIV diagnoses in 2017, which represents a 10.15% *increase* in new HIV diagnoses from the previous year—the only borough that had an increase in diagnoses. There are 30,429 people living with HIV in the Bronx and 32,683 in Manhattan, mainly concentrated in Harlem and the neighborhoods with the highest poverty rates. In New York City overall, MSM comprise 55% of all new HIV diagnoses, and 65% of new HIV diagnoses among men are MSM of color. Black and Latina women comprised over 90% of new HIV diagnoses among women in 2016.

However, access to successful HIV prevention methods such as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) has been lacking in many communities most deeply impacted by HIV. In 2016, only 2% of all people newly diagnosed with HIV in New York City had any history of using PrEP. Even though the epidemic is hitting black and Latino MSM hardest, the largest proportion of New York State Medicaid recipients taking PrEP to prevent HIV (37%) are white MSM. PrEP is more than 90% effective in preventing HIV transmission.

These populations need better access to sexual health education and health resources. SNPs provide comprehensive care coordination services, including HIV prevention education and treatment adherence assistance, and address social determinants of health such as housing instability, food insecurity, and poverty.

Amida Care, with over 7,000 members in NYC, has been able to connect its HIV-negative members of transgender experience to PrEP. Amida Care has enrolled 230 HIV-negative members of transgender experience since November 2017, when they became eligible to join the plan; all have been screened for HIV risk, and approximately 20% are now on PrEP.

“New York State has the tools to end the HIV/AIDS epidemic by 2020, but we need to do more to reach populations disproportionately affected by HIV,” Wirth added. “By extending SNP eligibility to all communities at higher risk for HIV, we can provide culturally competent sexual health services and highly effective HIV prevention tools, including PrEP and PEP, to more HIV-negative New Yorkers to help them stay negative and prevent new HIV transmissions.”

### **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 who are 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](http://www.amidacareny.org).

###