



**For Immediate Release**

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## **Amida Care and NEW Pride Agenda Host Town Hall on Trans Health and HIV Prevention in Queens**

*Online discussion featured New York City Council Member Daniel Dromm, Ahmed Mohamed of NEW Pride Agenda, Kiara St. James of New York Transgender Advocacy Group, Dr. Gayge Maggio of Callen-Lorde, Nayra Lee Berrios of Colectivo Intercultural TRANSgrediendo, and Alister Rubenstein of Amida Care*

*To view recording of Town Hall, click [here](#)*

**New York, NY** (June 30, 2021) – On Tuesday, June 29, 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 the NEW Pride Agenda, a nonprofit LGBTQ advocacy organization that works to promote LGBTQ rights in New York State, to discuss gender-affirming health care, sexual health services including HIV prevention and PrEP, and support resources in Queens. The town hall was the latest in a series of events co-hosted by Amida Care and NEW Pride Agenda that emphasize the importance of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), which is proven to reduce the risk of getting HIV from sex by 99%.

The panel discussion, with experts from HIV and LGBTQ service organizations, addressed the challenges that people of transgender experience face in accessing health care, as well as strategies to connect people to culturally competent care that acknowledge the diverse needs of the transgender community. The experts emphasized the importance of gender-affirming care in the fight to end the HIV epidemic. Gender-affirming care is critical in engaging transgender individuals in primary care and sexual health services that help prevent new HIV infections.

“I’m very grateful to have the opportunity to stress the importance of HIV care and health to our transgender community, which has been disproportionately affected by the virus,” said **Daniel Dromm**, New York City Council Member representing Queens’ 25th Council District in Elmhurst and Jackson Heights, in his opening remarks. “It’s really important that we gain a deeper understanding of PrEP and other drugs that are available to the community.”

**Ahmed Mohamed**, Civic Engagement and Community Organizer at NEW Pride Agenda, and moderator for the afternoon began by framing the discussion. “Every New Yorker has the right to live their fullest lives. But transgender New Yorkers face barriers to meet basic needs like health care,” said Mohamed. “Amida Care provides culturally-competent, gender-affirming care that New Yorkers of transgender experience need to thrive. But access to care is still a challenge in mainstream health care. The solution starts with adequate rates and a commitment to

comprehensive gender-affirming care, which will help end the HIV epidemic and create a more equitable health care system.”

Several panelists remarked on transphobia in health care settings, and discussed ways to ensure a more inclusive health care system moving forward. “It’s very important to understand the needs of the trans community, and to solicit that information from community members—even better, [health care] staff should represent the community,” said **Alister Rubenstein**, Transgender Health Program Manager at Amida Care. “We must hire trans people in these positions so we can create spaces that people can trust.”

Other panelists added that transphobia is not the only barrier that people of trans experience face when seeking health care. “I think it’s important to note that no one is *just* trans...and that being a part of other groups that experience oppression is not an additive effect, it’s a multiplicative effect,” said **Dr. Gayge Maggio**, Nurse Practitioner at Callen-Lorde Community Health Center. “All trans people in health care are going to face barriers based on being trans, in addition to barriers they will face for other reasons.”

**Nayra Lee Berrios** of Colectivo Intercultural TRANSgrediendo elaborated on some of those additional barriers, speaking from lived experience. “We have to be more clear in order to reach our trans sex worker and Latinx communities,” Berrios said. “When we confront the majority of promotional materials for PrEP, [those materials] often don’t recognize our communities. Sex workers still experience stigma speaking within our own communities about HIV and PrEP, because we have never received the correct information. We continue to be a group that is excluded.”

In order for all trans communities to access the care they deserve, radical change must occur. “We work within systems, and it’s important to understand that our main responsibility is to dismantle these systems,” said **Kiara St. James**, Co-Founder and Executive Director at the New York Transgender Advocacy Group (NYTAG). “Oftentimes medical institutions miss the mark, [and many trans people tell me] ‘I don’t want to go into a space that feels clinical.’” St. James added that she identifies as a Black transgender woman who has been on the front lines of this necessary shift, working to ensure hospitals and clinics provide specialized resources for transgender people, and particularly trans people of color.

The town hall concluded with an interactive quiz for audience members, aimed at dispelling common myths and misconceptions about PrEP. Local resources were available for those interested in learning more about accessing gender-affirming care in Queens.

**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](http://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>.