



# RED RIBBON TIMES

2025 Volume 15

14-15

2025 HIV and AIDS Awareness Day

## World AIDS Day (WAD) 2024 Recap

By Whitney Marshall

**On December 1, 2024 the Central Florida HIV Planning Council (CFHPC) hosted the seventh annual World AIDS Day (WAD) event at WinterClub Venue Villa Tuscan.**

This year's theme, "Remember & Commit", emphasized the need for both reflection and action in the fight to end the HIV epidemic. Significant progress has been made locally to prevent and treat HIV, yet the Orlando Metro Area currently ranks 6th in the country for the highest rate of new HIV diagnoses. The need for collective action in reducing and preventing HIV, decreasing stigma, and addressing the roots of health inequities has never been stronger. "Remember & Commit" was a call for our community to honor the past while remaining dedicated in the ongoing efforts to end the HIV epidemic.

Hosted by Koiya, the event honored several individuals who have worked tirelessly in their fight to end the HIV epidemic. Check out the list of award recipients for the 2024 Unsung Hero Award, Service Award, and Lifetime Achievement Award in the Orlando Eligible Metropolitan Area (EMA) and Brevard County. Attendees also witnessed the annual AIDS Quilt ceremony, received proclamations from Orange County Government representative, Claudia Yabrudy, and City of Orlando representative, Commissioner Bakari F. Burns, along with closing remarks by Florida State Representative Anna Eskamani. The event featured powerful speeches by Co-Executive Director of the SERO Project, Kamaria Laffrey, and poet Slam Anderson, with a closing performance by the Orlando Gay Chorus.

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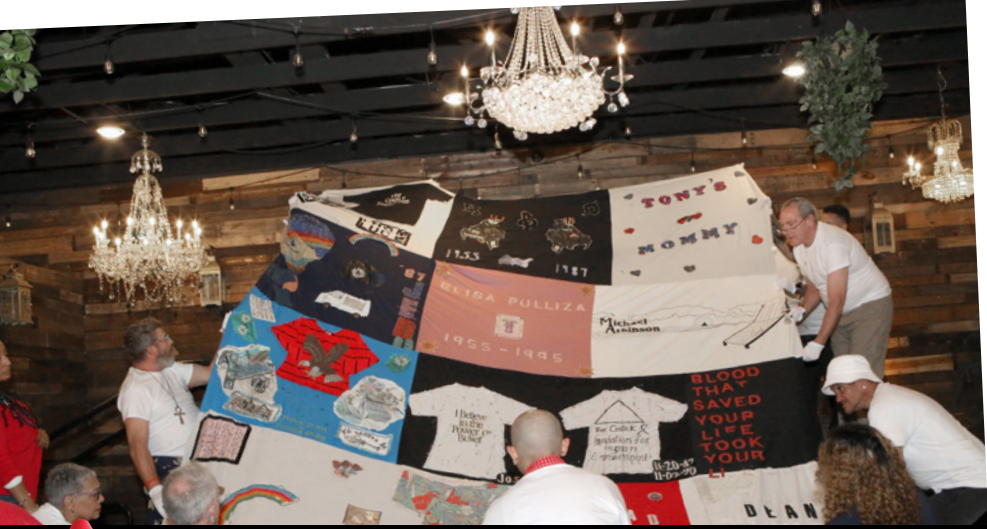
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# CENTRAL FLORIDA HIV PLANNING COUNCIL

## STANDING COMMITTEES

### Membership & Engagement Committee

- This meeting is the first Tuesday of the month at 2:00 PM

### Service Systems Planning & Quality (SSPQ) Committee

- This meeting is on the first Thursday of the month at 9:30 AM.

### Executive Committee

- This meeting is the Thursday of the week before the Planning Council meeting at 2:00 PM

### Planning Council Business

- This meeting is the last Wednesday of the month
- Meet-N-Greet (5:30 PM) & Meeting (6:00 PM)

### Ryan White Community Meeting

- This meeting is on the third Tuesday of the month at 6:00 PM. Dinner will be served and transportation available for RWHP clients.

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## RYAN WHITE PART A SERVICE PROVIDERS

**AIDS Healthcare Foundation**  
407-204-7000  
[www.aidshealth.org](http://www.aidshealth.org)

**Center for Multicultural Wellness and Prevention**  
407-648-9440 • [www.cmwp.org](http://www.cmwp.org)

**Dept. of Health in Lake County**  
352-771-5500  
<http://lake.floridahealth.gov/>

**Dept. of Health in Orange County**  
407-858-1437  
<http://orange.floridahealth.gov/>

**Dept. of Health in Osceola County**  
407-343-2030  
<http://osceola.floridahealth.gov/>

**Dept. of Health in Seminole County**  
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<http://seminole.floridahealth.gov/>

**Heart of Florida United Way**  
407-835-0900 • [www.hfuw.org](http://www.hfuw.org)

**Hope and Help Center**  
407-645-2577  
[www.hopeandhelp.org](http://www.hopeandhelp.org)

**Miracle of Love**  
407-843-1760  
[www.miracleofloveinc.org](http://www.miracleofloveinc.org)

**Orange County Medical Clinic Pharmacy**  
407-836-7160

**Midway Specialty Care Center**  
407-745-1171 • [midwaycare.org](http://midwaycare.org)

**Part A Recipient's Office**  
2002-A E. Michigan Street  
Orlando, FL 32805  
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This event would not have been possible without the generous contributions of our sponsors. Thank you so much to Aguilar Salud, Abriendo Corazones, and our presenting sponsor for 2024, Pineapple Healthcare. Special thank you to Heart of Florida United Way, Talk Test Treat, the Orlando Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., and all the members and volunteers that contributed their time to making the event a success.



Each year, the CFHPC commemorates World AIDS Day and reflect upon our worldwide response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Part of this celebration includes recognizing those who have dedicated their time and work to Ending the HIV Epidemic in Central Florida with the Unsung Hero Award, Service Award, and Lifetime Achievement Award. Congratulations to our 2024 award recipients!

**Unsung Hero- Orlando EMA**  
Andre Williams

**Service Award- Orlando EMA**  
Ken Terrell

**Service Award- Brevard County**  
Moses Santos

**Lifetime Achievement Award- Orlando EMA**  
Dean Hutchins

**Lifetime Achievement Award- Brevard County**  
Christine Hackford

**SCAN THE QR CODE  
TO WATCH THE RECAP  
VIDEO FOR WAD 2024!**



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Heart of Florida United Way  
1940 Cannery Way  
Orlando, FL 32804  
407-835-0906**

**CFHPC@hfuw.org**

**"Drop Us  
a Line..."**



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CentralFloridaHIVPlanningCouncil

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<http://centralfloridahivpc.com>  
<http://orangecountyfl.hiv>





## Florida Department of Health in Orange County Presents at the **2024 National Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program Conference**

**The 2024 National Ryan White Conference on HIV Care & Treatment (2024 NRWC) was held August 20-23, 2024, in Washington, DC.** The theme for this year's National Conference was "Innovating to End the HIV Epidemic: Empowering Communities, Expanding Partnerships, Implementing Interventions." HRSA's HIV/AIDS Bureau hosts the National Conference every two years to deliver program and policy updates, share innovative HIV interventions, and provide training and technical assistance. This biennial event provides a forum to share best practices and innovative strategies that empower participants and their communities to continue implementing a national response to reduce HIV-related health disparities and end the HIV epidemic in the United States. Participants include RWHAP recipients and subrecipients; federal, national, state, and local partners and organizations; health care and service delivery providers; and people with HIV.

Kelly Bastien, MPH, Quality Manager of Florida Department of Health in Orange County's Sunshine Care Center, presented in a 90-minute in-person educational session titled "Educational Approaches about Long-Acting Injectable Treatment for HIV that Enhance Equity:

Benefits, Challenges, and Strategies" along with representatives from other Advance Long Acting Injectables for Underserved Populations (ALAI UP) project implementation sites in Baltimore, Maryland, and Chicago, Illinois, in partnership with Columbia University. The session discussed the various educational approaches taken by each of the three implementation sites.

Long-acting injectable antiretroviral therapy (LAI ART) has the potential to dramatically transform HIV care and reduce HIV-related health inequities in achieving and maintaining viral suppression. However, utilizing LAI ART as a tool to advance health equity requires not repeating past mistakes, where new pharmacological innovations in HIV treatment and prevention (e.g., introduction of Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy (HAART) and Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)), further deepened health disparities.

Programmatic choices like which patients are educated about new HIV treatment options and which patients are deemed "ineligible" can have profound impacts on equity. The ALAI UP Project is a HRSA and Minority HIV/AIDS Fund (MHAF)-supported Special Project of National Significance (SPNS) initiative to accelerate

the equitable implementation of LAI ARTs. ALAI UP proposes that universal education about the availability of new LAI ARTs to all patients with HIV – regardless of clinical eligibility, perceived "fit" or interest, or insurance status – is an essential element to delivering LAI ART equitably.

The education session at the conference presented:

- Benefits of universal education for LAI ARTs (centers equity as a primary goal, protects against implicit bias, can motivate patients and care teams)
- Challenges of implementing universal education for LAI ARTs (concern that demand for LAI ARTs is greater than current agency capacity, desire to start with straightforward patients first, limited capacity to educate all patients given other agency demands)
- Strategies for implementing universal education for LAI ARTs given challenges, with insights from ALAI UP demonstration sites (e.g., active versus passive approaches, individual versus group-based approaches, training of clinical and non-clinical staff, documenting LAI ART education in health records).



# Pineapple Healthcare:

## Advancing Community Wellness in Central Florida

By Andres Acosta Ardila

Pineapple Healthcare has long been a cornerstone of compassionate care and community engagement in Orlando, Florida. Since its inception, Pineapple Healthcare has dedicated itself to addressing the diverse needs of our community, from providing accessible healthcare to championing vital social initiatives. Guided by our commitment to inclusivity and empowerment, 2025 marks a transformative year for Pineapple Healthcare, as we unveil new initiatives that expand our impact and deepen our dedication to serving Central Florida.

### A Legacy of Care and Collaboration

Under the visionary leadership of Executive Director Ethan Suarez, Pineapple Healthcare has become synonymous with excellence and community care. From its humble beginnings, the organization has grown into a trusted institution that not only provides medical services but also invests in the well-being of the entire community. This includes partnerships with local organizations like Abrigando Corazones, a nonprofit that supports vulnerable populations by distributing clothing, shoes, toys, and hygiene products.

Together, Pineapple Healthcare and Abrigando Corazones have reached thousands of individuals in need, offering tangible support and a sense of hope. This ongoing collaboration will continue in 2025, as we strengthen our joint efforts to serve the Orlando community.

### Debuting the Pineapple Mobile Clinic

One of the most exciting developments for 2025 is the debut of our mobile clinic. Recognizing the barriers many face in accessing healthcare, Pineapple Healthcare is taking its services on the road. The mobile clinic will bring essential medical

care directly to underserved neighborhoods across Central Florida, providing services such as preventive care, health screenings, and more. This initiative ensures that no one is left behind in their pursuit of health and well-being.

### Empowering Grassroots Organizations Through Grants

In 2025, Pineapple Healthcare will also evolve its philanthropic efforts by introducing a grant opportunity for small nonprofits and grassroots organizations. Scheduled for the summer, this initiative is designed to empower local leaders and amplify the impact of community-based solutions. By providing funding to organizations that share our mission of equity and compassion, Pineapple Healthcare aims to foster innovation and

collaboration across Central Florida.

### Continuing Our Mission of Giving Back

As we look to the future, Pineapple Healthcare remains steadfast in its commitment to giving back to

the community that inspires us. Whether through our partnerships, new initiatives, or the compassionate care we provide daily, our mission is rooted in the belief that together, we can build a healthier, stronger, and more equitable Orlando.

We invite you to join us on this journey. Whether as a volunteer, partner, or supporter, your involvement helps make our vision a reality. Stay connected with Pineapple Healthcare as we continue to grow and evolve, always with the needs of our community at heart.

**Follow Pineapple Healthcare on Instagram @pineapplehealthcare to stay informed of all the efforts happening in 2025.**





# Her ART Works

By Kara Johnson Williams

Each year, on December 1, the world gathers to remember those lost to and impacted by HIV/AIDS and champion the ongoing fight against the epidemic. Talk Test Treat Initiative under the Department of Health in Orange County in partnership with Black Room Project presented the second annual "Her ART Works—An Ode To Black Women," in honor of World AIDS Day. Black women continue to be disproportionately impacted by HIV, accounting for 54% of new HIV infections in women in the United States, despite making up less than 15% of the female population. In Orange County Black women are 12 times likely to contract HIV compared to their female counterparts (2022). Due to these disproportionate rates, it is important to provide access to HIV prevention and patient care tools to reduce stigma and end new HIV infections in our area. Her Art Works is an art installment experience dedicated to providing a visual journey through the stigmas & beauty of black women impacted by HIV. This year the ceremony feature was Ida Starks where she discussed her journey, as well as narrated the art exhibits. 115 individuals experienced the art exhibits which provided stimulating conversations, visual art pieces, intriguing installments, curated soundtrack, on site HIV testing, and linkage to prevent preventative and patient care services. Through our survey data 75% of the participants were aware of PrEP, 50% were aware of the Mpox vaccine, through our partners Crew Health we were able to test 16 individuals and identified a new diagnosis who was referred to HIV treatment.





# A Walk For Change

By Kara Johnson Williams





**The Area 7 Program's Talk Test Treat initiative in collaboration with The LGBT+ Center Orlando coordinated "A Walk For Change" held on Saturday November 16, 2024 in downtown Orlando.** "A Walk for Change" served as the 2024 Ending the HIV Epidemic engagement session to bring attention to the barriers affecting the HIV Epidemic in Central Florida. Through "A Walk for Change" the community had the opportunity to unite and raise funds to address HIV stigma, HIV testing, and HIV preventative treatment and care. All funds raised will go to the 10 benefitting not-for-profit agencies: Sunshine Specialty Health Outreach Foundation, Positive Assistance, Pineapple Healthcare, The LGBT+ Center of Orlando, Bliss Cares, Light House of Hope Safe Spot, Embrace Health, Hope & Help, Miracle of Love, and Center for Multicultural Wellness and Prevention. Through these agencies they will provide access to services for HIV patient care services and the prevention of new HIV cases: including vision support, food pantry access, post-partum care for people with HIV, lab assistance for PrEP and transportation assistance.

The event was sponsored by the following: The City of Orlando, Chembio, 26 Health, Comprehensive Health centers of Orlando, Hope and Help, Gilead Sciences, Bliss Health, and Advent Health. The City of Orlando Mayor and Orange County Mayor provided proclamations in honor of the day, which were presented by Chris Haubenestel and Kara Williams. There were a total of 20 teams with each team having 10 members and 65 individual walkers which was a total of 255 walkers. Special thanks to the heart of Florida United Way for sponsoring the central Florida HIV Planning Council team.

After the walk we celebrated our achievements at Luminary Green Park in UCF Creative Village. There were a total of 18 vendors providing health and wellness services and community resources. HIV testing was provided by Talk Test Treat and Bliss Cares, and a total of 38 individuals were tested. During the celebration it was announced the benefitting agencies raised a total of \$65,000.





# Building Safe Spaces:

## A Journey of Empowerment and Support

By Anthony McNeil, Lead EHE Peer



**During my preceptorship experience as a Peer Specialist in HIV, I, Anthony McNeil, had the opportunity to collaborate with Ricky Pettigrew to create and facilitate a monthly support group for Aspire Health Partners.** As the Lead EHE Peer, with Ricky serving as my partner in this program, we worked through the Center for Multicultural Wellness and Prevention to establish the Community Safe Space initiative. This program focused on supporting individuals living with HIV in transitional housing, providing them with a safe and inclusive environment to address the unique challenges they encounter. For 11 months, we met on the first Monday of each month, guiding participants through important conversations about topics that directly affect their health, well-being, and quality of life. Through this group, we were able to create a platform where individuals could share experiences, learn from each other, and gain tools to enhance their self-sufficiency.

### Key Topics Explored Throughout the Program

Each session was carefully designed to address the practical and emotional challenges that people with HIV (PWH) experience. The following are some of the core themes we explored:

1. *Disclosure and Confidentiality/Boundaries*  
We began with conversations around the sensitive issue of disclosure, helping participants understand how, when,

and to whom to disclose their status. We also discussed setting boundaries-emphasizing the importance of protecting personal information while maintaining healthy relationships in transitional settings. Participants learned how to recognize safe environments for disclosure, empowering them to make informed decisions.

2. *HIV Life Cycle and Medication Adherence*  
Through interactive discussions, we explored the HIV life cycle and emphasized the critical role of adherence to antiretroviral therapy (ART). Participants reflected on their challenges with medication management, and we provided strategies for overcoming barriers-from setting reminders to coordinating with case managers for prescription refills. These discussions allowed attendees to better understand how treatment works and the importance of staying consistent to achieve viral suppression.
3. *Balancing Medication and Mental Health (Depression)*  
We acknowledged that the journey with HIV is not only physical but emotional as well. During these sessions, we addressed mental health challenges, including depression and anxiety, which are common for individuals in transitional housing. Participants were encouraged to share their mental health struggles openly, and we introduced coping strategies like journaling, mindfulness practices, and connecting with mental health professionals. These conversations helped reduce stigma around mental health and opened pathways for seeking professional support.
4. *Employability Skills and Financial Literacy*  
Recognizing that financial independence plays a critical role in overall well-being, we partnered with guest speakers to provide employability training. Participants learned job-search strategies, resume-building tips, and how to prepare for interviews. Another session focused on budgeting and the importance of saving money, even with limited income. These practical skills empowered participants to take steps toward achieving greater stability and self-reliance.

### Impact and Key Accomplishments

1. *Increased Engagement and Trust*  
One of the most significant achievements of the Community Safe Space initiative was the strong sense of trust and community we built with participants. Over the months, attendees began to open up more about their experiences and challenges, which helped foster a supportive environment. This sense of connection was essential for individuals living in transitional housing, where isolation can be a common struggle.
2. *Empowerment Through Education*  
Through the various educational sessions, participants gained greater confidence in managing their health. They not only learned about viral suppression and medication adherence but also developed the tools needed to navigate complex healthcare systems. Many participants shared that they felt better equipped to advocate for themselves during medical appointments and follow-ups.
3. *Guest Speakers and Broader Perspectives*  
Our partnership with guest speakers introduced participants to valuable community resources. These sessions provided actionable guidance on employment opportunities and financial literacy-key components in helping individuals break free from the cycle of dependency and move toward self-sufficiency. One participant reflected, "I never thought I'd be able to manage my money better, but now I've started saving a little each month."
4. *Ongoing Mental Health Support*  
The conversations around mental health were particularly impactful. Participants expressed that having a space to talk openly about depression made them feel validated and less alone. Several individuals who were previously reluctant to seek help began working with mental health providers, demonstrating the importance of having open discussions about mental well-being.
5. *Continuous Learning and Skill Building*  
As the months progressed, participants demonstrated greater self-awareness and problemsolving abilities. They began setting personal goals, such as sticking to medication regimens or applying for part-



time work. The workshops helped them visualize a future beyond transitional housing, providing hope and direction in their journeys.

#### 6. *Reduced Stigma and Increased Resilience*

One of the most meaningful outcomes was the reduction of internalized stigma around HIV. Through education and peer discussions, participants learned to view themselves beyond their diagnosis. They embraced their ability to lead fulfilling lives and actively supported each other during difficult moments, building a network of resilience and mutual care.

### Reflections and Takeaways

This preceptorship experience was transformative—not only for the participants but also for me as a Peer Specialist. I witnessed firsthand how education, empathy, and community can transform lives. The Community Safe Space initiative allowed me to apply the concepts I learned in the Peer Specialist in HIV course to real-life scenarios. I gained a deeper understanding of the multidisciplinary care approach, seeing how different professionals—case managers, mental health providers, and employment specialists—can collaborate to meet the complex needs of people with HIV.

Additionally, working alongside Ricky Pettigrew and Naomi Vera-Salmon gave me insight into how to facilitate group discussions effectively, maintain confidentiality and boundaries, and ensure that participants felt safe and supported. I also saw the importance of collaborating with community partners to offer a comprehensive range of services, from mental health care to financial education. The 11-month partnership between Aspire Health Partners and the Community Safe Space initiative was a powerful demonstration of how consistent support and structured programming can create lasting change. Participants left each session feeling more informed, empowered, and connected. This experience reaffirmed my belief in the power of peer support and the importance of building community spaces where individuals can heal, learn, and grow together.

Moving forward, I plan to continue applying the strategies I learned during this preceptorship to future roles in peer support. I am grateful for the opportunity to have contributed to this meaningful initiative and look forward to continuing this work in other settings where I can advocate for, educate, and empower individuals living with HIV.

# I Know What It Feels Like to Be Broken

By Rene Cotto-Lewis

**Twenty-two years ago, I accessed the Ryan White Program for the first time.** But it wasn't until 14 years ago that those services had the deepest, most life-changing impact on my life; not simply because the tools were available, but because I made the bold choice to use them. I decided to stop surviving and start thriving.

I know what it feels like to be broken. To be homeless. To feel invisible, unheard, and discarded. I know the pain of being encouraged to take a leap; write the book, launch the course; only to be met with silence and rejection.

But here's the truth: Change doesn't happen just because resources exist. Change happens when you stop waiting for life to get better and start taking action with the tools right in front of you.

### The Tools Are Available: But Will You Use Them?

The Ryan White Program offers life-saving resources; mental health therapy, peer mentoring, substance abuse services, and more. But services alone won't transform your life. The tools work when you work them.

Fourteen years ago, I made the scariest decision of my life: I stopped settling for temporary solutions and chose to face my reality head-on. I accessed a mental health therapist, joined substance abuse meetings, and built genuine connections with those ready to help me grow. It wasn't easy, but it was the best decision I ever made.

Instead, I took accountability for my life and used the system to empower myself, not to enable myself. I refused to accept quick fixes that would keep me stuck in the same cycle. What we do today impacts our tomorrow. The tools are here. The question is, will you use them?

### Are We Taking These Services for Granted?

Last summer, I attended the 25th International AIDS Conference in Germany, where I met people from countries with minimal access to the services we often take for granted in the U.S. Many had no reliable access



to medications, mental health support, or peer services; yet they would give anything for the opportunities we have.

Here, we sometimes become so accustomed to these services that we feel entitled to them. I've been guilty of that too. But the truth is, we are privileged to have these tools available. They aren't just there for survival, they are there for growth, healing, and transformation. But they only work when we choose to engage with them fully.

### You Hold the Power to Change Your Life

The Ryan White Program isn't just a safety net, it's a bridge to a better life. But a bridge can only take you somewhere if you choose to cross it.

I'm living proof that the tools can work when you're ready to take bold action. I've experienced the fear, the rejection, and the self-doubt; but I've also experienced the freedom that comes from taking accountability and using every tool available to me.

The hour is now. Will you keep waiting, or will you take the first step?

### You have the tools. You have the opportunity.

What you choose today will create your tomorrow.





# Living with Purpose:

## A Story of Faith and Transformation

By Sueanne Vazquez

### INTRODUCTION

**As a Positive Woman, I stand as living proof that resilience, faith, and purpose can lead to a life filled with joy and fulfillment.** My journey has been a testament to the transformative power of community, chosen family, and the belief that age or circumstances should never limit your dreams. This story isn't just mine—it's a reminder that you can rise above challenges, connect with others, and make a difference. I did not plan this I had no clue. The turning point came when I realized that my experiences and challenges were meant to be used for a greater purpose. God opened doors I didn't expect, and through the encouragement of those He placed in my life, I felt compelled to step into this calling. While I have always had a giving spirit, I never imagined serving on this scale—reaching people who look like me and come from so many different walks of life. At the core, we are all connected. Whether positive or not, we are all His children, and above all else, we are human. End of that story.

From organizing events that provide essentials to not only the unhoused, such as hygiene kits and warm blankets, but also to our many forgotten Seniors, to empowering individuals in the PLWH community through mentorship initiatives like leadership training and peer support programs, I have been blessed to help those who need it most. I am also a certified HIV tester, a role that has allowed me to engage with the community in meaningful ways, providing critical support and education while fostering trust and awareness about HIV prevention and care. Additionally, I have had the honor of helping SmartCare pharmacy in connecting with our PLWH community, ensuring that vital resources and care reach those who need them most. Imagagie that my contributions have grown far beyond what I ever envisioned. This journey is a testament to the transformative power of faith and purpose. This is nothing but God—He gave me the tools, such as patience, resilience, and a heart for service, along with opportunities to connect with communities in need.

The calling on my life was clear, and I obeyed. He placed people in my life who aligned with His plan for me and for them as well, such as the head pharmacist of the pharmacy, whose guidance and support helped shape my advocacy journey. The CDO's vision for expanding care aligned with my calling, creating opportunities to collaborate on initiatives that improved access to treatment and empowered others in the community. Their contributions have been instrumental in fulfilling the vision God set forth. the SmartCare , Aspire Partners, and this honestly began while I was at the residential program at Aspire facility came a knock at the door holding meds in hand the CDO of Smart Care and that's when this all come to play him with a vision me with Gods plan. However, I was not diagnosed there; my diagnosis came earlier, marking a turning point that would eventually lead me to this incredible journey. When I was first diagnosed, it felt like the world was crashing down. The stigma, both internal and external, weighed heavily on me. But over time, I found purpose, positivity, and the strength to move forward.



## Resilience Through Routine

Taking one pill daily has been a vital part of my journey. It's a simple act, but one that symbolizes resilience and self-care. When I first started my ART (antiretroviral therapy), it required over five pills daily, which was overwhelming and stressful. Managing so many medications took a toll on my mental health, as it was a constant reminder of my diagnosis. However, I persevered, trusting in the advancements of science, and now, I am grateful for the simplicity and effectiveness of just one pill providing 100% coverage. Making me stress my mental health it made me unexplainable then but now I see Now, thanks to advancements in science, one pill provides 100% coverage. This progress is a testament to the power of innovation and the commitment to improving lives. I've learned the importance of staying focused and not letting distractions veer me off my path.

## Partnerships That Empower

One of the pivotal moments in my life was three years. It began with a knock on my door. Medication in hand, the CDO of the pharmacy, which LOL was not my Pharmacy on File but again God doesn't make mistakes so here we are back to the story when it began a small conversation about ART medication that grew into a significant collaboration that empowered not just me but many others. For three years, this partnership has been a cornerstone of my advocacy work. I have expanded my focus to include senior citizens, sharing their stories and working to reduce stigma within their communities. My dedication to HIV care remains steadfast and will always be a priority, as I continue to actively support the PWH (People With HIV) community through mentorship programs, advocacy campaigns, and organizing events that foster connection and empowerment.

## A Turning Point of Faith

In the earlier years of my diagnosis, I struggled deeply, facing suicidal thoughts and multiple attempts. But none succeeded, because God already had my path laid out for me. Through prayer, I gained a sense of peace and clarity, counseling helped me unpack and navigate the emotional weight of my struggles, and my loved ones provided consistent encouragement and a safe space to share my fears. Together, these elements gave me the strength to heal and move forward with renewed hope and purpose. Counseling helped me unpack the emotional weight of my struggles, while my chosen family—a group of individuals I hold dear, many not by blood but by heart—provided consistent encouragement and a safe space to share my fears. Their collective support gave me the confidence to rediscover my

purpose and embrace life with renewed hope. I just needed to be silent and listen to His guidance. This realization became a turning point, showing me that my life had a greater purpose.

## Advocacy Through Community

As a member of the Ryan White Planning Council, I've seen firsthand the power of advocacy. This council is open to everyone, regardless of HIV status or gender, because every voice matters. I encourage others



to join, to make their voices heard, and to be part of a supportive and inclusive community.

## The Power of Community Support

Community has been a lifeline throughout my journey. Organizations like Aspire Partners, AdyaCare Foundation, QLatinx, SomosLoud, , Abriendo Corazones, and Alegría—whose “La Caravana de la Alegría” The Salvation Army and CareWell Insurance just to name a few so many more hidden gems initiative served 100 seniors during the holidays—have been invaluable. For instance, during “La Caravana de la Alegría,” I witnessed seniors' joy as they received care packages and blankets, a reminder that even small acts of kindness can bring immense comfort and connection. Additionally, we have fed the unhoused, providing essentials ranging from hygiene items to warm blankets, shoes, and so much love. Their support and initiatives remind me that none of us walk this path alone.

## A Personal Testament of Love

On a personal level, I've been blessed with a loving relationship for 25 years with someone who is not HIV positive. Our bond

is a testament to the power of love and understanding, proving that HIV doesn't define the capacity for deep and meaningful connections.

Fun fact: I am 63 years old, and this serves as a reminder that age should never be a barrier or stigma in pursuing your goals and living your truth. It is proof that resilience and empowerment can thrive at any stage of life, reminding us to embrace every opportunity with faith and purpose. Embracing every stage of life with purpose and resilience is a testament to the power of perseverance and faith.

## A Message to Inspire

My message is simple: Don't wait 30 or even 20 years to find your purpose. Take control of your health, stay focused, and embrace your journey now. Life is precious, and we each have the power to shine, regardless of the challenges we face.

Every day, wake up and say this phrase: 'I am!' Follow it with a positive message of your own that reflects your unique journey and aspirations. Let this affirmation connect to the faith and transformation that have carried you, anchoring you in resilience and purpose. This daily practice serves as a reminder of the strength and growth you've cultivated, empowering you to face each day with confidence. Let it set the tone for your day and empower you to face the world with confidence.

## Looking Ahead

This is my story, and I hope it inspires others to find strength in theirs.

In addition, I will be attaching pictures from my 2024 journey filled with great wishes and New Year's resolution to continue being a vessel for my King and following His guidance. These photos highlight the incredible volunteers who have been part of their own calling. For example, during a Golden Unity Beauties event, volunteers went above and beyond by organizing a surprise dinner for seniors, complete with live music and gift baskets. From Community Love Feast, Golden Unity Beauties, Salvation Army Volunteering, One Wash at a time, and so many other outreach events we have cherished in 2024, their dedication and love have been the heartbeat of every initiative, and I am honored to share their contributions. Let these moments be a testament to the incredible year behind us and the exciting projects ahead.

## Closing

**Happy Volunteering! Happy You,  
Happy Life, Happy Self! I AM  
SUEANNE A WOMAN OF FAITH...  
NOW YOU I AM\*\***





# 2025 HIV AND AIDS AWARENESS DAYS

Awareness days help educate the general public and specific communities about HIV and AIDS. Display this poster as a reminder of upcoming awareness days, and use the hashtags provided to spread the message on social media.

## FEBRUARY

7

### National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day

#NBHAAD

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Black people account for 37% of new HIV cases, even though they make up only 12% of the U.S. population. NBHAAD helps raise awareness of HIV testing, prevention and treatment in communities of color.



28

### HIV Is Not a Crime Awareness Day

#HIVisNotACrime

HIV-specific laws are outdated, they punish people living with HIV and they disproportionately impact Black, Latino and LGBTQ people and individuals who engage in sex work. This awareness day aims to educate people about HIV criminalization laws in the country and amplify the work of those trying to reform them.



10

### National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day

#NWGHAAD

Women are less likely to be screened for HIV, in part because of the perception that they are not at risk. This awareness day emphasizes the need for further prevention efforts aimed at women and girls and promotes equity in HIV care and treatment.



20

### National Native HIV/AIDS Awareness Day

#NNHAAD

Observed on the first day of spring, this day aims to combat HIV-related stigma in Indigenous communities. It also encourages American Indians, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians to get tested and promote awareness of HIV in their communities.



## MARCH

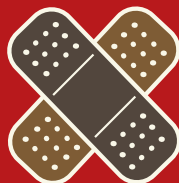
## MAY

18

### HIV Vaccine Awareness Day

#HVAD

Led by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, HVAD showcases the progress made in the search for a safe and effective HIV vaccine. It also marks an opportunity to educate communities about the importance of vaccine research.



19

### National Asian & Pacific Islander HIV/AIDS Awareness Day

#APIMay19

This awareness day presents an opportunity to highlight how HIV uniquely affects Asians and Pacific Islanders. The goal is to promote HIV testing and treatment and encourage conversations about HIV in these communities.



19

### Hepatitis Testing Day

#HepTestingDay

Approximately 20% of people living with HIV nationwide also have hepatitis C, and around 10% of people with HIV are also living with hepatitis B. Hepatitis Testing Day aims to raise awareness of hep B and C and encourage testing.



## APRIL

10

### National Youth HIV & AIDS Awareness Day

#NYHAAD

According to the CDC, people ages 13 to 34 accounted for 60% of estimated new HIV infections in 2022. This awareness day was launched to encourage young people to talk about HIV and AIDS.



18





## JUNE

5

### HIV Long-Term Survivors Awareness Day

#HLTSAD

First observed in 2014, this awareness day honors long-term survivors of HIV, highlights the challenges they face and provides an opportunity to advocate for resources to meet their particular needs.



27

### National HIV Testing Day

#HIVTestingDay

According to the CDC, approximately 13% of people living with HIV don't know they have the virus. This awareness day serves as a reminder to people of all ages to learn the facts about HIV and get tested for the virus.



## JULY

21

### Zero HIV Stigma Day

#ZeroHIVStigmaDay

This awareness day spearheads a movement that highlights the detrimental impacts of HIV-related stigma around the world and promotes ways to take action against it.



## AUGUST

20

### Southern HIV/AIDS Awareness Day

#SHAAD

In 2022, nearly half of new HIV diagnoses were in the South. SHAAD raises awareness of the HIV crisis in the region and marks an opportunity to advocate for resources to address it.



31

### National Faith HIV/AIDS Awareness Day

#NFHAAD

HIV affects people of all faiths across the United States. The goal of NFHAAD, which is observed on the last Sunday in August, is to bring together Muslims, Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus and members of other religions to raise awareness and fight the virus.



## SEPTEMBER

9

### National African Immigrants and Refugee HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis Awareness Day

#NAIRHHADay

This awareness day draws national and local attention to the HIV and viral hepatitis needs of African immigrants living in the United States through awareness, education and resources. The goal is to address some of the unique issues that African immigrants face.



18

### National HIV/AIDS and Aging Awareness Day

#HIVandAging

According to the CDC, more than 50% of people living with HIV in the United States are ages 50 and older. This awareness day promotes education around HIV and encourages HIV testing for all older adults.



27

### National Gay Men's HIV/AIDS Awareness Day

#NGMHAAD

According to the CDC, gay and bisexual men accounted for 71% of new HIV infections in the United States in 2022. NGMHAAD is a time to promote HIV testing and raise awareness about HIV prevention and treatment and the unique needs of gay and bi men.



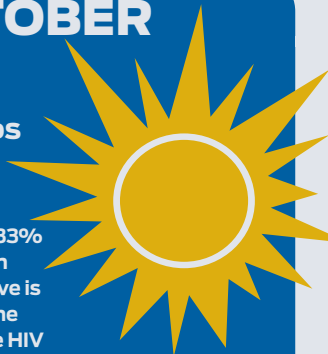
## OCTOBER

15

### National Latinx AIDS Awareness Day

#NLAAD

According to the CDC, Latinos accounted for 33% of new HIV infections in 2022. NLAAD's objective is to unite and mobilize the community to promote HIV testing and education.



## DECEMBER

1

### World AIDS Day

#WorldAIDSDay

Nearly 40 million people across the globe were living with HIV in 2023, according to UNAIDS. On this awareness day, the world comes together to show solidarity in the fight against HIV, express support for those living with the virus and remember those lost to the epidemic.







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