

AIDSWatch 2026: Highlights From the HIV Advocacy Event on the Hill

Nearly 600 HIV activists from across the nation gathered in DC to defend progress and demand justice. [VIDEOS]

March 27, 2026 By [Trent Straube](#)

More than 600 HIV activists representing 42 states and territories gathered in the nation's capital March 16 to 18 for AIDSWatch 2026, an annual advocacy event spearheaded by AIDS United. This year's AIDSWatch theme was "Defending Progress, Demanding Justice."



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"As we encounter increased political attacks that threaten to dismantle decades of progress at the local, state, federal, and global levels, we must reflect on what our movements' have won and demand what we are still owed," wrote AIDSWatch organizers on AIDSUnited.org. "At AIDSWatch

2026, we discussed evolving threats, lessons learned, and movement building strategies, and then, we brought our concerns directly to Congress on Capitol Hill.”

In addition to sharing personal stories with members of Congress and advocating for HIV policies, participants attended workshops, plenaries and training sessions. AIDSWatch Institute and Workshop events included:

- “From Lived Experience to Coverage Decisions: How Patient Voices Can Guide HIV Advocacy Efforts in 2026,”
- “You Won’t Disappear Us: Research, Strategy, Advocacy and a National Black Research Agenda,”
- “You Are the Expert: An HIV and Aging Talking Circle,”
- “The Color of Access: Medicaid Work Requirements and What They Could Mean for People Living With HIV” and
- “Peer Power in Rural America: Community-led HIV Prevention Strategies from Appalachia and Beyond.”

In fact, AIDSWatch offered over 20 community-led workshops, and participants held over 250 congressional meetings.

At this year’s event, Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-New Jersey) was presented with the Congressional Lifetime Achievement Award for her work in helping end the HIV epidemic. Last month, [Coleman reintroduced the PrEP Assistance Program Act](#) to make pre-exposure prophylaxis to prevent HIV affordable and accessible, especially to LGBTQ, Black and Latino communities, which are disproportionately affected by the epidemic.

And activist Venita Ray was awarded the AIDSWatch Lifetime Achievement Award:



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A post shared by Yonatan Matheus (@yonatanmatheus)

Means Girls icon Daniel Franzese participated in events, picking up the bullhorn and delivering inspiring speeches. “Today I spoke on the Capitol lawn with Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation and AIDS United,” he posted on Instagram. “We’re facing cuts that could reverse decades of progress. I’ve learned you don’t have to be directly impacted to stand up for something and not look away. After 40 years of work, we know what prevents HIV and what keeps people in treatment. When that support is weakened, infections rise and care is disrupted.”



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A post shared by Daniel Franzese (@whatsupdanny)

For 33 years, AIDS United has been bringing the HIV community to the Hill for what is the “largest constituent-driven HIV federal advocacy event in the country.”

AIDSWatch 2026 was organized by AIDS United, the U.S. People Living with HIV Caucus and the Center for Health Law and Policy Innovation at Harvard Law School. The Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation has provided longtime support to the event, and ViiV Healthcare and Merck sponsored the New Advocate Training and Congressional Reception.

Advocacy groups from across the nation send members to participate in the annual event. Search #AIDSWatch and #HIVAdvocacy on social media to find a collection of posts, including images and videos. We’ve included various posts throughout this article.

Protesters held numerous related actions across the city, including [marches and a symbolic funeral to protest HIV funding cuts](#). In addition, [an event titled “Housewives on the Hill”](#) organized by PrEP provider MISTR brought several stars of the Real Housewives franchise to rally for HIV funding and prevention.



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