Hoosiers Thriving With HIV #CelebrateUU — and So Can You!

An Indiana photography exhibit and global social media campaign fight HIV stigma and celebrate Undetectable Equal Untransmittable (U=U).

December 13, 2024 By Trent Straube

A combination art exhibition and awareness initiative in Indianapolis titled CelebrateUU spotlights 25 Hoosiers living with HIV and their inspiring insights about achieving an undetectable viral load. A related social media campaign invites folks across the globe thriving with HIV to post images and narratives of their journey to health; CelebrateUU's goal is to create a movement to fight HIV stigma, raise awareness of the epidemic and promote the power of U=U (Undetectable Equals Untransmittable).

U=U refers to the fact that people living with HIV who maintain an undetectable viral load don't transmit HIV to others through sex (also known as treatment as prevention). What's more, people with HIV who maintain viral suppression experience slower disease progression, enjoy better overall health and are less likely to develop opportunistic illnesses.

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CelebrateUU is the brainchild of Indianapolis-based artivist (artist/activist) Todd Fuqua, who is HIV positive.

“This is more than an exhibition of portraits,” Fuqua said in a press statement. “It’s about changing the way we see HIV and ourselves as a community. It’s about celebrating strength, resilience and the science that allows us to envision an end to this epidemic.”

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The exhibit, which opened shortly before World AIDS Day, observed each December 1, will remain on display at the Indianapolis Public Library until December 29 and includes 25 portraits of Hoosiers—as Indiana residents are known—who are thriving with HIV. Each portrait includes a QR code directing viewers to that individual’s story.

The images are also viewable online at CelebrateUU.org and on social media via the hashtag #celebrateuu.

Fuqua issues a call to action to all people thriving with HIV to share their UU stories online. Specifically, the CelebrateUU movement asks folks to take the follow steps:

- SELFIE: Take a selfie!

- STORY: Answer the question “What does U=U mean to you?”

- SHARE: Share your story and selfie to your social media with hashtags #CelebrateUU, #UequalsU, #UU6 (replacing the 6 with the number of years you’ve been undetectable!).

- TAG US @CelebrateUU on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter.



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The campaign recognizes that “not everyone is able to reach an undetectable level. We believe we all have worth as human beings living with this disease, that our value is not determined by our viral load (V≠V). As we #CelebrateUU, we celebrate ALL who are living with HIV, resilient and strong.”

“#CelebrateUU is more than a collection of powerful and important stories,” Fuqua, added. “#CelebrateUU is also a movement calling on people living with HIV to celebrate years of having an undetectable viral load—much like people celebrate years of recovery from addiction or years

of remission from cancer.”

The initiative emphasizes that anniversaries are important because:

- They matter to the individual’s own survival and joyful living, reminding them each year to appreciate their health.

- They matter to the newly diagnosed, giving them hope of reaching this important milestone in their ongoing treatment.

- They matter to our communities, breaking down the silence, stigma and shame associated with the HIV epidemic.

- They matter to the world, as we work toward ending this epidemic.

Fuqua funded the project with a grant from the Marion County, Indiana, Ending the HIV Epidemic Task Force.

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The Ending the Epidemic (EHE) initiative is the 10-year plan to lower new HIV rates by 75% by 2025 and by 90% by 2030. This would amount to fewer than 3,000 HIV cases a year. “Reducing new infections to this level,” according to the initiative, “would essentially mean that HIV transmissions would be rare and meet the definition of ending the epidemic.”

The strategy for reaching these benchmarks involves investing federal funding and resources in programs such as Rapid Start and PrEP in the 57 key states, counties and cities (referred to as jurisdictions) that together account for 50% of new HIV cases. These jurisdictions include 48 counties nationwide plus Washington, DC; San Juan, Puerto Rico; and seven rural states with high HIV burdens (Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, Oklahoma and South Carolina).

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Marion County is a key EHE target, according to a CelebrateUU press release, which adds:

- Marion County leads the state in HIV cases, with over 5,000 individuals living with HIV.
- Black residents in Marion County are 10.5 times more likely to acquire HIV than white residents.
- Nearly 60% of new cases in Indianapolis have occurred within the Black community.

- One in eight people living with HIV remain unaware of their status.

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