

An Immersive Theater Experience About HIV, Stigma and Gay Black Men

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Black gay men should expect to see themselves accurately portrayed in the theatrical production *As Much As I Can*. That's because it was created by and for that audience, specifically those living in Baltimore, Maryland, and Jackson, Mississippi.

Billed as an “immersive theater experience”—meaning that actors address the audience and that audience participation is involved—the show is playing January 12 to 15 in Baltimore and January 26 to 29 in Jackson. For details, including free tickets, [click here](#).

The show is part of ViiV Healthcare's Accelerate! initiative, a four-year \$10 million program launched in early 2015 with the aim of improving the health and well-being of Black men who have sex with men in Baltimore and Jackson, where HIV rates are particularly high among this population.

[According to ViiV](#), Accelerate! is guided by three key strategies:

- Listen to men's experiences and prioritize their perspectives to drive impact.
- Activate key community and research insights through collaborations and funding for new efforts that inspire and support men to seek and maintain quality health care.
- Amplify those insights and ongoing lessons from Accelerate! to inform current paradigms and practices and improve the delivery of HIV prevention, care and treatment.

As part of the initiative, gay Black men in these two cities participated in community listening sessions about love, faith, stigma, HIV, resilience, inspiration—topics that relate to their lives. The stories helped in the development of the play, with local actors and professionals taking part in the show. The idea is to use theater as a platform for social change and to raise the voices of gay Black men in the epidemic.

The center of today's U.S. HIV epidemic is in the South, where 44 percent of people living with HIV in the United States are diagnosed, according to statistics from the Centers for Disease Control

and Prevention (CDC).

To read inspiring stories about advocates working to fight HIV in the South, read the [2016 POZ 100](#), which celebrates the region. And the January/February 2017 issue of POZ also focuses on the South—for more, click [here](#).

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