

Magic Johnson on HIV Awareness in 2023, Grandkids, Marriage

Magic Johnson and his wife, Cookie, were honored at the Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation's annual ball.

September 28, 2023 By Laura Schmidt

Last week, the [Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation \(ETAF\)](#) honored NBA Hall of Fame legend, philanthropist and businessman [Earvin "Magic" Johnson](#) and his wife, Cookie Johnson—also a philanthropist and entrepreneur—at the fourth annual Elizabeth Taylor Ball to End AIDS fundraising gala.

Cohosts Angela Bassett and Courtney B. Vance presented the Johnsons with the Elizabeth Taylor Commitment to End AIDS Award for their steadfast work in HIV and AIDS awareness.

Johnson, perhaps the most famous face of the HIV epidemic, told the crowd: "What a true blessing it is to be here tonight, to receive an award from the woman who Cookie and I cherish and worked so hard with to change the face of the disease, to bring awareness, to raise money, to care for people who were living with HIV and AIDS, to provide housing for them and, last but not least, to stop discrimination against people living with HIV and AIDS."

"Elizabeth meant so much to us," Cookie said onstage. "She was one of the first to stand up for the disease. Despite the ridicule she got for it, she just kept pledging ahead and look at what it has done."

[On November 7, 1991, Johnson shocked the world](#) by announcing at the height of his fame that he had tested positive for HIV and was retiring from the Los Angeles Lakers immediately. He remains an advocate for HIV and other health issues, speaking out, for example, about the importance of COVID-19 vaccines and against misinformation and [conspiracy theories](#).

Supported by presenting sponsor Gilead Sciences and diamond sponsor Bulgari, the ETAF gala at the Beverly Hills Hotel raised a record amount and was deemed "the most successful gala" in the organization's history, according to event cochair Christine Chiu, who [shared the news onstage](#).

"When Elizabeth Taylor founded the [Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation](#) decades ago, she knew what is still so clear today. The HIV/AIDS epidemic is not just a health crisis. It is also a social

justice and health equity crisis,” Bassett said at the event. “Even though we’ve made so much scientific progress, people living with HIV still face stigma, discrimination, criminalization and profound inequities.”

In a related [interview with Variety](#), the Johnsons recounted their HIV journey and advocacy over the past three decades. The Johnsons’ foundation has given over \$15 million to underserved communities of color across the country.

“There are a lot of people living healthy lives now who got diagnosed just like me, 30 years ago 40 years ago, 20 years ago,” Johnson told Variety. “That couldn’t happen back then because we didn’t have the drugs. We didn’t have the information on how to be here for a long time. A lot has changed for the good.”

“It’s great to see the advancements we made, but I think because people are so healthy and living long lives on medication, the young people are not scared,” Cookie said, adding: “I think the answer is to continue to educate.”

“I’ve had a positive mindset and attitude,” Johnson told Variety, “because the only thing in life I wanted really was to be with Cookie forever and hopefully see that we would have some grandchildren. Our son Andre has provided that for us. I want to walk my daughter Elisa down the aisle one day and hopefully that happens. I want EJ also to be married as well. That’s what we’re going for.”

ETAF was established in 1991 to carry out Elizabeth Taylor’s vision for an AIDS-free world. Through direct care and prevention efforts, advocacy, education and fundraising, ETAF provides care and support to the most marginalized and underserved populations affected by HIV and AIDS.

Although former President Barack Obama was not in attendance, he had a message for the Johnsons that was read aloud.

“They didn’t just help raise research dollars or educate the public. They moved us to think in an entirely new way about a condition affecting millions of people around the world—changing attitudes with the kind of grace and encouragement that only true leaders can display,” Obama wrote. “It was the same grace and courage Elizabeth Taylor displayed when she became the first globally recognized HIV and AIDS activist. Work that has been carried on in so many ways by the foundation that bears her name. Magic’s pragmatic, optimistic approach to his diagnosis ended up changing the way the world saw the disease.”

The star-studded evening included a performance from the “Empress of Soul” Gladys Knight, who brought the Johnsons to their feet for a slow dance to “The Best Thing That Ever Happened.”

To read more about the Johnsons contributions to the HIV/AIDS community, click [#Magic Johnson](#). There, you’ll find headlines such as “[Thirty Years Since Magic Johnson Disclosed His HIV Status](#),” “[Magic Johnson Did NOT Contract HIV From a Hepatitis Vaccine](#)” and “[Magic Johnson Shares His](#)

[Life, From the NBA to HIV, in a New TV Series."](#)

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