NAESM's New HIV Clinic in Atlanta Prioritizes Black Gay Men

Focusing on Black gay men in Atlanta, Total Life Care Center offers HIV and STI testing and treatment, PrEP for prevention and more.

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A new HIV-care clinic in Atlanta offers a range of sexual health care and social support services to its most impacted patient population: Black gay men.

The one-stop Total Life Care Center clinic is the brainchild of NAESM, a community-based organization in Atlanta that focuses on the health and wellness of Black men who have sex with men. The clinic offers services such as HIV care, testing and prevention, including pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). It also offers tests for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and helps individuals secure housing and health insurance and meet other needs, according to WABE, an Atlanta-based radio station.

"Who we want to serve here are folks that don't have those resources, that need to be held particularly closely, that may feel uncomfortable in mainstream services, and so being able to provide that to 500 to 800 patients, we think, is really important," Alvan Quamina, NAESM's CEO and executive director, told WABE.

Inside NAESM's Total Life Care Center, which tailors HIV and sexual health care to gay Black men in AtlantaCourtesy of NAESM/ATSHOTIT

Georgia has some of the highest HIV rates in the country. In fact, the state ranks fourth in total number of HIV cases, following Florida, California and Texas, according to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) HIV Surveillance Report.

In 2021, nearly 60,000 people in Georgia were living with HIV, according to AIDSVu data. Black Americans made up the majority (68.5%) of this population. What's more, of the total number of Georgians taking PrEP to prevent HIV, only about 33% were African American.

In Atlanta, Black folks accounted for about 70% of the estimated 39,100 individuals living with HIV in 2021.

Quamina says barriers to timely prevention and treatment, comprehensive health care and health insurance are some of the reasons Black people are disproportionately impacted by HIV.

Occupying several floors at NAESM's building at 14th Street NW, Total Life Care Center seeks to address the growing need for HIV care and prevention for Black gay, bisexual and same-gender-loving men.

The clinic also supports a large population of Black women seeking HIV and STI testing.

"But overwhelmingly, who we target, who we prioritize, who we were created for are Black gay, bisexual, same-gender-loving men. And because we reflect that population, we really are a home for them, a medical home for them, and a social service home for them," Quamina told WABE. "They don't have to explain themselves. They don't have to apologize. They don't have to feel uncomfortable, because we are them and they are us. And so the importance of the clinic is being

able to provide medical services that reflect our community.”

The clinic’s opening ceremony welcomed about 75 people with food, speeches, a dedicated prayer and a tour.

The clinic boasts meeting spaces and new patient exam rooms and offers both in-person and telehealth services. It also operates several mobile clinic vans that provide HIV and STI prevention and testing in the wider Atlanta metro area.

Mobile clinic vans are transforming HIV care in communities throughout the country. In a POZ article and related video by the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, Susanne Doblecki-Lewis, MD, MSPH, chief of the division of infectious diseases, said the mobile units help medical professionals “get out of the clinic, out of the hospital and into the communities with what we know works for HIV treatment and prevention.”

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