

PrEP Peer Educators Help Prevent HIV on Black Campuses

Meet the Human Rights Campaign's new class of students at historically Black colleges and universities trained in HIV prevention, education, stigma and more.

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As students returned to historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) this fall, many learned about HIV prevention thanks to a group of 12 student PrEP ambassadors trained by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation (HRCF), the educational arm of the LGBTQ advocacy group the Human Rights Campaign.

PrEP, or pre-exposure prophylaxis, refers to daily pills and long-acting injectables taken by people at risk of contracting HIV.

For the 2023–2024 school year, the 12 students will serve as PrEP Peer Educators and work to eliminate HIV- and AIDS-related stigma on HBCU campuses by educating fellow students about PrEP and HIV testing and treatment, according to an HRCF news release.

“We are thrilled to welcome this dynamic cohort of HBCU students and take great pride in the work they’re doing to continue spreading the message of HIV awareness on the respective campuses,” Leslie Hall, director of HRCF’s HBCU Program, said in the news release. “As a Black gay man and HBCU alumnus, I’m aware of the hurdles college-aged youth face when it comes to knowing their status and taking the appropriate measures to maintain their optimal health.”

About 13% of the 1.2 million people living with HIV in the United States are unaware of their status. Of all new HIV diagnoses in 2019, Black and Latino individuals accounted for 42% and 22%, respectively. What’s more, one out of every five new HIV cases are seen in young people ages 13 to 24. Yet 44% of those individuals do not know their status.

Although HIV impacts young people—especially those in minority populations—at an alarming rate, over half of HBCUs lack formal HIV prevention policies. The ambassador program fosters safe

environments throughout the country to educate college students about the realities of the HIV epidemic and necessary preventive care.

“The creation of this ambassadorship program serves as an outlet for those who may be unfamiliar with the nuances surrounding HIV but want to take measures to ensure their community is educated on this impactful topic,” Hall added.

Currently, health insurers must cover PrEP to prevent HIV, though a conservative Texas Court case may end that mandate.

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