Southern HIV/AIDS Awareness Day 2021

This year's SHAAD theme—Support.Act.Change—pays homage to 20 years of HIV service from the Southern AIDS Coalition.

August 20, 2021 By Trent Straube

Friday, August 20, marks Southern HIV/AIDS Awareness Day (SHAAD) 2020. The event was launched two years ago by the Southern AIDS Coalition because, as stated on SouthernSolution.org, "There is an HIV/AIDS crisis in the South. This reality requires all of us to be engaged in collective, bold, and innovative strategies to reduce these disparities."

Indeed, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Southern states today account for an estimated 51% of new HIV cases annually, even though just 38% of the U.S. population lives in the region." In other words, the epidemic, which was once centered in urban cities such as Los Angeles and New York City, is now concentrated in the 16 states and the District of Columbia that make up the South.

> Black Americans comprised less than 1/5 of the #Southern population in 2019, but half of all new #HIV diagnoses in the region in 2019. Learn more about #HIV among Black Americans in the #South for #SHAAD: https://t.co/NJcDFcsGMW pic.twitter.com/aFNzUf0EWq
>
> — AIDSVu (@AIDSVu) August 19, 2021

The CDC offers more data regarding the epidemic in the South:

> The impact of HIV in the South also varies by race. African Americans are disproportionately impacted in every risk group…accounting for 53% of new HIV diagnoses in the region in 2017.

> Black gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (MSM) account for 6 out of every 10 new HIV diagnoses among African Americans in the South. Among MSM, the number of new diagnoses in Black MSM is nearly twice that of white and Hispanic/Latino MSM. While the number of new HIV diagnoses is similar among the latter two groups, new diagnoses among Hispanic/Latino MSM in the South have increased 27% since 2012, while new diagnoses among white MSM in the South have decreased 9% in the same period. Among women, Black women are also disproportionately impacted, accounting for 67% of new HIV diagnoses among all women in the South.

For more statistics pertaining to HIV and the South, visit AIDSVu.org, which not only breaks down HIV data according to geography and various communities but also creates easy-to-understand graphics you can share, such as the ones embedded in this article. AIDSVu also includes interviews with experts on the topic of SHAAD, such as "Dr. Susan Reif, PhD, on HIV-related Stigma in the Deep South."

"It's not just about having available #PrEP, testing, or medical care. If folks feel the stigma, shame, and negative emotions in accessing these services, they're not going to go." Dr. Susan Reif of @DukeGHI in AIDSVu's #SHAAD Q&A: https://t.co/jBQCPOQrVw

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To address these disparities and draw attention to the epidemic, the Southern AIDS Coalition (SAC) launched the awareness day in 2019. The theme of this year's event is "Support.Act.Change." The theme's initials are the same as those of the coalition, and the theme is a nod to the group's 20 years of service as well as a call to action. SouthernSolution.org spells out the three components of SHAAD 2021:

> SUPPORT
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> When we "Support," our communities are transformed and those living with HIV will thrive. The HIV epidemic in the South is layered and complex. Systemic inequities coupled with unjust policies, result in health disparities and disproportionate rates of HIV and other conditions.

While the work to right these wrongs can seem insurmountable, every individual can play a role in supporting those living with and most impacted by HIV/AIDS.

How?

1. Combat stigma by sharing accurate information about transmission, care, and HIV prevention strategies—including testing, U=U [Undetectable Equals Untransmittable], PrEP/PEP [pre-exposure prophylaxis/post-exposure prophylaxis] usage, and syringe exchange programs.

2. Be there for a friend or loved one who is hesitant about HIV testing!

3. Mentor and encourage young and seasoned community leaders who are on the front lines for their communities!

4. Listen to people living with HIV in your community—and follow their lead!

5. Support a local community-based organization that provides resources for people living with and most impacted by HIV. Donate, volunteer, follow them on social media, and share their content!

ACT

When we "Act," together, policies and laws change. Use your voice and influence to change hearts, minds, and practices that perpetuate discrimination and do harm to those most impacted by HIV. Together we can actively dismantle these systems and rebuild equitable spaces that lead to change.

How?

1. Respond to calls to action and follow policy organizations such as North Carolina AIDS Action Network, AIDS United, and Latino Commission on AIDS.

2. Share surveys, events, and work done by community advocates in the South that you find through our networks so that data can be used by health departments and affect strategy to end the epidemic.

CHANGE

When we commit to "Change," we acknowledge both our individual and collective power to the course of the epidemic, but how are we changing? We not only have to have conversations, but we look at who we are supporting and our actions to evaluate better ways to end the epidemic. As the COVID pandemic continues to show us, there are always disparities that intersect by race and class, does the work reflect that?

How?

1. Start the conversation in your community or join the conversation with seasoned advocates. The work needs new voices & new ways of thinking around how we end the epidemic.

Continue to challenge the process and ask “why?” When the work looks like something isn’t working, find conventions or advocates to work with and promote a change to the system.

Dafina Ward leads the Southern AIDS Coalition.Angela Hopper

In related news, be sure to read “Fight With Us,” POZ’s profile from this summer on Dafina Ward, pictured above, the executive director of the Southern AIDS Coalition. For a collection of articles about HIV in the region, click the hashtag #South. You’ll find articles such as “Three Demands From the HIV Leaders of Black South Rising” and “$5M Grant Launches a Faith Center to Tackle HIV in the South [VIDEO].”

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http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/southern-hivaids-awareness-day-2021