

Southern HIV/AIDS Awareness Day 2023

#SHAAD is Sunday, August 20. In 2021, the South comprised 38% of the U.S. population but 52% of new HIV diagnoses. Here's why.

August 18, 2023 By [Trent Straube](#)

Sunday, August 20, marks Southern HIV/AIDS Awareness Day ([#SHAAD](#)) 2023. Founded by the [Southern AIDS Coalition](#) in 2019, SHAAD “is a powerful reminder of the need for an unwavering commitment to southern communities,” write the organizers on [SouthernSolution.org](#), urging everyone to raise awareness and advocate for “new and necessary resources and solutions to turn the tide of HIV/AIDS in the South.”

For several years, the [South](#) has been the epicenter of our nation's [HIV epidemic](#), particularly for people of color. In 2021, the South comprised 38% of the U.S. population in 2021 but 52% of new HIV diagnoses, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and presented in charts, graphs and maps by [AIDSVu.org](#).

What's more, [Black Americans](#) represented half of those new HIV diagnoses in the South, even though they account for only 19% of the region's population.

Several factors contribute to higher HIV rates in the South, including poverty, unemployment, stigma, lack of access to care in rural areas and a lag in the region in testing, treatment and education.

In addition, many Southern states have not expanded Medicaid. The health insurance program for low-income and disabled Americans, is the largest source of health coverage for people living with HIV in the United States, according to [AIDSVu.org](#). Medicaid coverage varies from state to state. Most states expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare). The 10 holdouts are Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Wisconsin and Wyoming, which has exacerbated health disparities in the South.

Making matters worse, states are currently in the process of disenrolling millions of people from the program, a process referred to as the Medicaid unwinding. For a related story, see “[Lack of Medicaid Support Fuels the HIV Epidemic in Georgia](#).”

#SHAAD presents an opportunity to address these HIV-related challenges in the South. As SouthernSolution.org spells out, Southern HIV/AIDS Awareness Day highlights the need to end HIV criminalization and to promote justice for Black, brown and LGBTQ minorities—populations that face discrimination, stigma and higher HIV burdens.

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