

We Are Still Here: Black Power, HIV Justice and the Work Ahead

A message from AIDS United's Carl Baloney Jr. for National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day (NBHAAD).

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On National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, marked each February 7, we honor the lives, leadership, and legacy of Black people who have shaped the HIV response in this country, often in the face of profound neglect, hostility, and loss.

This moment demands honesty. We are living through a political climate marked by coordinated attacks on public health, civil rights, bodily autonomy, and the institutions meant to protect us. Harm reduction is under siege. HIV prevention and care are being politicized. Black communities, particularly Black women, Black LGBTQ people, and Black trans people, continue to bear the brunt of these assaults.

And still, we are here.

The truth is this: The progress we have made against HIV exists because Black people organized when institutions failed. Black advocates demanded action when silence meant death. Black researchers, clinicians, and community leaders built systems of care where none existed. Black organizers redefined what justice, dignity, and survival look like in practice. Every major advance in HIV, from treatment access to prevention breakthroughs, carries the imprint of Black leadership.

We should name what that progress represents. HIV is no longer a death sentence. Millions are living long, full lives. New prevention tools exist that were once unimaginable. Entire generations have been spared because people refused to accept indifference as policy.

But progress is not the same as power, and it is not the same as justice.

HIV remains a proxy for deeper inequities in this country. Where HIV thrives, so do poverty, housing instability, criminalization, gender-based violence, restricted access to care, and political disinvestment. The same systems that drive HIV disparities are the systems that weaken democracy, erode worker protections, restrict voting rights, and determine whose lives are deemed worthy of investment.

Ending the HIV epidemic requires more than services. It requires organized communities with the power to shape policy, hold institutions accountable, and demand a government that works for us.

Today is not just about awareness. It is about building power.

I am calling on policymakers to protect and expand HIV funding, not retreat from it. I am calling on funders to invest boldly in Black-led organizations and long-term movement infrastructure, not just short-term outcomes. I am calling on advocates to organize across issues, mobilize voters, and connect HIV to the broader fight for racial justice, health equity, and human rights. And I am calling on all of us to refuse a future where Black lives are treated as expendable in public health policy.

Black people have always led this fight, not only to survive, but to transform the systems that failed us.

On this National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, let us honor the past, defend the present, and organize relentlessly for a future where ending the HIV epidemic is inseparable from building a more just, equitable, and democratic society.

— Carl Baloney, Jr.

President and CEO, AIDS United

If you want to invest in Black leadership and Black power in the HIV movement, I invite you to support the [Cornelius Baker Fellowship Fund](#). Your contribution helps build the organizing, policy, and movement infrastructure we need not just to end the HIV epidemic, but to transform the systems that sustain it.

[This message](#) was originally posted February 6, 2026, on AIDSUnited.org.