

U.S. Businesses Seek to Accelerate the Movement to End HIV

Nearly 70 companies are addressing the virus within and beyond their own walls.

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In 2024, the Match Group dating apps BLK, Chispa and Archer—which are aimed at the Black, Latino and gay/bisexual male communities respectively—partnered with the [Together Take Me Home](#) initiative to get free HIV self-testing kits into households most affected by the HIV epidemic (such as, Black and Latino households in high HIV incidence areas, such as the Deep South). The apps sent out push notifications offering delivery of free at-home tests, resulting in more than 875 orders from BLK, more than 900 from Chispa and an unconfirmed number from Archer.

Match Group’s undertaking of this initiative was driven by their involvement in the [U.S. Business Action to End HIV](#) (USBAEH), a public health/private sector partnership started in 2022 within Health Action Alliance, a broader such partnership. USBAEH’s seeds were planted when the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS (PACHA) wrote the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) calling for increased private sector involvement in the federal Ending the HIV Epidemic (EHE), which began in the first Trump administration (and which HIV advocates are hoping the second Trump administration will continue to move forward). ViiV, the HIV drugmaker, gave USBAEH seed money.

Since then, USBAEH has grown to 68 official members (including ViiV and fellow HIV drugmaker Gilead to pharmacies including CVS and Walgreens to companies such as Uber, Walmart and Chevron) and to roughly 500 companies with a lower threshold involvement, such as regularly receiving USBAEH educational materials about HIV treatment and prevention to share with their employees.

Match Group joined USBAEH because “key focus areas for us as a company are LGBTQ inclusion and rights, sexual health and making sure that public health programs are accessible and well-funded,” says Tasha Menaker, senior director of social impact for Match Group. “So we felt like joining the coalition reflected our commitment to those topics.”

She’s echoed by Charley John, a former pharmacist and now senior director of health care policy and strategy at Walgreens. He says that USBAEH has allowed Walgreens to strengthen and amplify HIV-related work it has long been doing, such as turning roughly 550 Walgreen sites nationwide into free HIV testing sites for National HIV Testing Day. Being part of USBEAH, he tells

POZ, “helps us jazz up our preexisting efforts and brings a lot of new entities and ideas together to accelerate solutions to ending the epidemic.”

When companies agree to join USBAEH, they choose to initiate at least one action from a menu of six provided by USBAEH.

Those include:

- Leading on HIV. Publicly sharing their commitment to USBAEH and urging other companies to get involved.
- Strengthening HIV services for employees. Reviewing and bolstering HIV health benefits, such as full PrEP coverage for pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and nondiscrimination policies for their workers.
- Educating workers and ending HIV stigma. Giving workers up-to-date HIV information and promoting workplaces free of HIV stigma and discrimination.
- Advocating for policy and systems change. Lobbying for continued federal and state funding for HIV services and for the repeal of outdated laws that criminalize people with HIV for having sex without disclosing their status.
- Supporting local communities most affected by HIV. Working with existing local HIV service providers.
- Providing financial support. Giving either to USBAEH directly or to local HIV service providers.

This is according to Caroline Jackson of Meteorite, a company that facilitated the founding of USBAEH within the pre-existing larger public entities-plus-private sector partnership Health Action Alliance it had facilitated to respond to COVID. She says that in 2023, USBAEH’s first full year, that 39 companies committed to about 120 actions (an average of about three actions per company)—numbers that rose to 68 companies committing to more than 220 actions in 2024.

One initiative that grew out of USBAEH and launched in partnership with HIV community organizations and coalition members, she says, is called Rx EACH, in which typically rival pharmacies such as CVS and Walgreens have banded together to promote more offering of HIV testing and PrEP services on site at pharmacies. [Research](#) has shown that doing this could vastly expand the reach of such services at a time when new HIV rates remain stubbornly flat within certain demographics, such as young Black and Latino men who have sex with men, even as those rates have plummeted dramatically the past decade among white men who have sex with men (heavily due to higher adoption of PrEP).

This effort is slow and difficult, says Jackson, because while some states have passed legislation to

allow pharmacists to prescribe PrEP, they haven't passed legislation to allow pharmacists to reimburse for these services.

But Charley John of Walgreens says that the effort, of which his company is a part, is worth pushing forward state to state, as well as with federal agencies like the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) that could set up a reimbursement mechanism for pharmacists. He sees the effort as an extension of work Walgreens has already done, like push successfully for Medicare coverage of PrEP to be moved from Medicare's Part D, which only covers drugs, to Part B, which also covers services such as the regular testing for HIV, sexually transmitted infections and organ function needed for PrEP use. The switch, he says, provides more of a "comprehensive, end-to-end way of taking care of the patient" when it comes to preventing HIV.

He hopes the coalition will have the same success with getting more states to let pharmacists prescribe and oversee PrEP. Because many people even with insurance may still not have a regular primary care physician, he says, "pharmacists are so well-suited to help in this regard." He notes that, so far, up to 15 states have passed legislation allowing pharmacists to do this work, "and more states plan to introduce the legislation this year."

One company that's a member of USBAEH is Mercer, a massive human resources consulting company with high-profile clients including AT&T, Aetna, IBM and Goldman Sachs. Mercer led a USBAEH sign-on [letter](#) early in 2024 asking Congress to reject big cuts to HIV programs proposed by Republicans in the House. The cuts were averted. The company also took actions including publishing an [article](#) on "5 Things Employers Can Do to End HIV," releasing a similar [video](#) and joining Gilead and AIDS United in contributing to an [article](#) titled "Living with HIV" that appeared as a USA Today insert.

If these actions sound relatively small, they're not, says Vikki Walton, health equity leader at Mercer and one of the company's point people on its USBAEH membership. "With major corporations," she says, "just to take a stand on HIV is not a small thing, because there are so many different players and opinions" within a large company. She said that even actions companies took within their four walls, such as educating employees about HIV testing, prevention and treatment options, were significant. "Employees value and trust their employers when it comes to their health," she says. "There are ways to [help fight the HIV epidemic] that don't always mean being on Capitol Hill. You can change the health of your own employees and their families."

However, as people living with HIV and their allies and service providers face potentially devastating cuts to HIV programs amid new Trump administration advisers and a solidly GOP-led Congress, many of whom have called for such cuts, it's an open question as to whether USBAEH—with its collective corporate power and influence—can be an effective voice against such losses.

Certainly that's the hope of Carl Schmid, founder of the HIV lobbying group HIV+Hepatitis Institute, who played a major role in getting USBAEH started and serves as its government affairs

cochair. “I’ve always wanted to have a private sector component [to HIV lobbying] like the way that [the global HIV program] PEPFAR has its own business coalition or the Global Fund has Friends of the Global Fund.”

He also said that USBAEH came out of a January 14 meeting with a government affairs game plan that would involve more letters, opinion pieces and Hill visits, as well as working at the state level with USBAEH’s chapters in Houston, Los Angeles and Atlanta. “We need to energize and activate state and local leaders,” he says. “That’s how you really get things done.”

“I think we see an opportunity with the new administration and Congress,” says Jackson from Meteorite. “The first Trump administration launched Ending the HIV Epidemic, so this is a chance to continue that work, in part by bringing more businesses to the table to raise the visibility of HIV as an issue on the Hill. And to help lawmakers understand why funding HIV programs is best for both business and public health.”

Both Schmid and Jackson say they believe that USBAEH members, rather than uniting with HIV community members (including those living with HIV) for the series of “telling our story” Hill visits that happen during the [AIDSWatch](#) conference, which takes place this year March 31-April 2 in Washington, DC, should engage with lawmakers separately. “The consumer [people living with HIV and their allies] voice is just one, and I guess I’d question how strong a voice it is,” says Schmid. “The business community has a different perspective and can get into places that the HIV community can’t get into.”

Jackson says that USBAEH wants to stand out as a strong voice distinct from AIDSWatch, even if both efforts are essentially asking for the same things. “It’s a pretty significant statement for a group of businesses to come together on the Hill to raise visibility for HIV,” she says. “If we do our visit after AIDSWatch, we’ll be reinforcing their visits.” She did say, however, that she would invite USBAEH members to AIDSWatch’s array of panels and workshops to learn more about the HIV community.

But Schmid says that he thoroughly intends for USBAEH to be a strong voice on the Hill and in state houses as HIV services, and health care funding in general, face an uncertain future. “A coalition like this is really crucial right now,” he says. “A business-oriented message resonates with certain people, particularly at this time.”