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Engaging Youth Voices in the HIV & AIDS Response

Advocates for Youth Supports Young People Across the Country Who are Transforming the Way the World Sees HIV & AIDS on National Youth HIV & AIDS Awareness

Washington, D.C. - We have an alarming health issue on our hands. [According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC), [nearly 26 percent of all new HIV infections](#) occur among young people ages 13 to 24 years old. Of those new infections, African-American youth and young men who have sex with men (YMSM) are most at risk: nearly 60 percent of new infections in young people are among African Americans, while 87 percent of infections among young males are in YMSM. Many of these youth are at higher risk due to factors they have little control over, including lack of access to health care, and sexuality education that does not address their needs.

“Society has a responsibility to provide young people with all the tools to safeguard their sexual health,” said Angel Brown, Senior Program Manager, LGBTQ Health and Rights at Advocates for Youth. “Young people *can* make healthy decisions regarding their sexual health when they have the proper support, resources, skills, and guidance they need.”

At the root of [National Youth HIV & AIDS Awareness Day](#) (NYHAAD) is the belief in youth activism, and young people’s ability to not just transform their own lives, but the lives of their peers and the world. After a nationwide search, [10 Youth Ambassadors](#) were selected to represent NYHAAD in their communities. On April 10 and beyond, this year’s Ambassadors will share their experiences of how young people are uniquely impacted by HIV; the barriers they face in HIV prevention, testing, and care; and how best to translate these experiences into action for an AIDS-free generation.

To get to an “AIDS-free Generation” we must commit to programs and policies which prepare and empower all young people, but especially youth of color and young men who have sex with men, to protect themselves from HIV. Young people need and deserve culturally appropriate, LGBT inclusive sex education, safe environments, and access to youth friendly sexual and reproductive services that meet their unique needs. And we must dismantle the structural barriers like poverty, racism, and homophobia, which put them at greater risk.

Calling on his peers to engage in the HIV & AIDS response, Youth Ambassador Ignacio Cruz said, “It all starts with a call to action—people to fight for justice, voices to scream and raise hell, and the courage to do what is right. It all starts with young people just like me and you.”

Created in 2012 by 12 founding partners, National Youth HIV & AIDS Awareness Day (NYHAAD) is now officially recognized by [AIDS.gov](#). NYHAAD is observed annually on April 10 and celebrated by several organizations across the U.S.

On April 10, NYHAAD Youth Ambassador Wesley Dixon and Advocates' Program Coordinator for National Youth HIV & AIDS Awareness Day, Sulava Gautam-Adhikary, will appear on [Huffington Post Live](#) for a conversation on the impact on HIV and AIDS on young people, and this generation's response to the epidemic. Join the conversation at 5:30 PM EST.

Additionally, on NYHAAD and beyond, young people across the country will host movie screenings, speak out at church meetings, host poetry slams and testing events to educate other young people and society about the necessity of engaging young people on the topic of HIV & AIDS.

It is more important than ever to recommit to the fight against HIV and AIDS by investing in young people. Young people must be brought to the table not only as partners, but as leaders that can truly change the tide of the HIV and AIDS epidemic. Only by fully investing in young people - in their health, their education, and their leadership - can we reach an AIDS-free generation.

For more information on NYHAAD follow [@YouthAIDSDay](#) on Twitter and Instagram, like National Youth HIV & AIDS Day on [Facebook](#), and online at www.youthaidsday.org

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National Youth HIV & AIDS Awareness Day Founding Partners: Advocates for Youth; Adolescent AIDS Program at the Children's Hospital at Montefiore Medical Center; AIDS Alabama; AIDS Alliance for Children, Youth & Families; AIDS TaskForce of Greater Cleveland; AIDS United; Hetrick-Martin Institute; Metro TeenAIDS; National Coalition of STD Directors (NCSD); National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors (NASTAD); National Black Gay Men's Advocacy Coalition; National Minority AIDS Council; and Sexuality Information and Information Council of the United States (SIECUS).

Advocates for Youth is a national nonprofit that champions programs and advocates for policies that help young people make informed and responsible decisions about their sexual health. Advocates' Youth Activist Network stands 75,000 strong on 1,000 campuses and in tens of thousands of communities.