



**ALAMEDA COUNTY HEALTH CARE SERVICES AGENCY
PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

Colleen Chawla, Director
Kimi Watkins-Tartt, Director

1100 San Leandro Blvd
San Leandro, CA 94577

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Neetu Balram
Public Information Manager
Alameda County Public Health Department
neetu.balram2@acgov.org

Statement on World AIDS Day 2021

World AIDS Day 2021 gives us opportunity to pause, reflect, and recommit to the vital work needed to address the stark inequities evident in the HIV epidemic.

Yesterday, on the eve of World AIDS Day, the [CDC released its new Vital Signs Report](#), which looked at HIV infection, diagnosis, treatment, and prevention among gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men from 2010-2019. The study found that infections among men who have sex with men remained higher and relatively stable among Black and Latinx men when compared to white men. The report concluded that if we plan to end the HIV epidemic we must see improved, equitable outcomes among these communities. Achieving this vision will mean improving access and use of HIV services and addressing social determinants of health.

These conclusions won't be a surprise to those who closely follow the HIV epidemic locally and nationally. Structural forces, including systemic stigma and homophobia, transphobia, poverty, racism, xenophobia, violence, insufficient resources, and curtailment of basic freedoms, give the HIV pandemic its social shape. Structural interventions are needed to address these upstream factors as well as to improve the quality, availability, affordability, accessibility, and acceptability of HIV services.

The local HIV epidemic hits Alameda County's Black and Brown communities hardest, centered primarily around gay and bisexual men (inclusive of both cisgender and transgender men) and Black and Latinx women (inclusive of both cisgender and transgender women). Alameda County also has an aging population of people living with HIV, whose health care needs are not too different from those of other aging adults.

While we have seen a consistent reduction over the past nine years in new HIV infections in most groups in Alameda County, we have not seen similar reductions among young Latinx gay men. The local HIV epidemic primarily impacts Black and Brown men who have sex with men, and Black residents represent the highest proportion of people living with HIV. And although their numbers are smaller, we are concerned with recent spikes in new HIV infections among immigrant men and people who inject drugs.

Many Alameda County residents face severe challenges related to poverty and a shortage of affordable housing. Both issues have particularly damaging impacts on persons living with HIV. Based on recent surveys, persons living with HIV experience higher rates of homelessness and poverty in comparison to the general population, placing them at much greater risk for negative health outcomes.

For these reasons, Alameda County is doubling down on its commitment to innovative programs directed to populations hardest hit by HIV by partnering closely with key community-led organizations like the Oakland LGBTQ Center, Bay Area Community Health, CalPEP, Project Open Hand, East Bay Advanced Care (EBAC), WORLD, and the East Bay Getting to Zero Coalition – just to name a few.

In October, we launched a new [East Bay Cares app](#) that offers a directory of agencies providing HIV care and prevention services in the East Bay region. The app allows users to access the most up-to-date information right from their mobile devices. The East Bay CARES app provides easy and quick access to what users need-- from providers and support resources to important events--when they need it. In the coming months, we will host several townhalls to elicit input before we release new HIV funding opportunities.

We must work harder to ensure all people living with HIV learn their status, are connected to care as quickly as possible, and maintain treatment to increase viral suppression at the population level. Our outreach, education, and prevention efforts should be user-friendly, laser focused and tailored.

As our fight against COVID-19 wages on, we must not forget our fight against AIDS continues. On this World AIDS Day, we draw inspiration from people who are living with and disproportionately impacted by HIV with respect and humility. They teach us about resilience and the importance of community in the face of persistent inequities and disparities that drive pandemics. We would be foolish not to take their lead.

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