

THE OAKLAND LGBTQ COMMUNITY CENTER RECEIVES \$300K IN GRANTS TO SUPPORT THE LAUNCH OF A NEW HIV PREVENTION & WELLNESS PROGRAM.

Oakland, CA - It has been over twenty years since Alameda County declared a state of emergency due to the disproportionately high number of HIV cases occurring in the African American community, a crisis that is ongoing today. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, if current new HIV infection rate trends continue, 1 in 2 African American gay and bisexual men and 1 and 4 Latino gay and bisexual men will be diagnosed with HIV in their lifetimes. Transgender people of color are at particularly high risk due to transphobia, not just from the general population but also from medical providers and discrimination directed at the Transgender community from the highest levels of government.

In response to these staggering statistics and in recognition of World AIDS Day, Oakland's first all-inclusive LGBTQ Community Center, is announcing the launch of their first HIV prevention and linkage to care and treatment initiative called Wellness First, an innovative LGBTQ community-based, holistic wellness program, that aims to address the isolation, stigma, racism, homophobia, and lack of LGBTQ culturally competent care that prevents the most at-risk members of our community, especially Black and Latino gay and bisexual men and transgender people of color, from getting the support that they need and deserve. Gilead Sciences has awarded the Center \$250,000 to implement the program. "When Jeffrey Myers and I first founded the Center in 2017, we knew, as African American gay men, who have lived in Oakland for decades, that the HIV epidemic is not over for us as people of color. White gay and bisexual men and white transgender people have received consistent messaging and funding resources directed at their community at all income levels, unfortunately, that has not been the reality for Black & Latino queer people in particular." Said Joe Hawkins, CEO and co-founder of the Oakland LGBTQ Community Center. Since 2006, locally, HIV infections have declined the most among people who are white and also men who have sex with men—mirroring national data.

The goal of Wellness First is to reduce health inequities and barriers to HIV prevention, care and treatment services for African American and Latino gay and bisexual men and transgender people of color. The program will provide HIV testing and prevention services, linkages to care and treatment, social enrichment and community engagement activities to all participants, with an emphasis on the particular needs of Black and Latino gay and bisexual men, and transgender people of color. The grant will support the hiring of Wellness Service Coordinators who will offer counseling and connect participants to community resources to include STI testing and linkages to treatment services. Health Outreach staff will make community members aware of the services available at the Oakland LGBTQ Center.

The Center's HIV Wellness First Initiative is modeled after SAMHSA's "Eight Dimensions of Wellness", which include taking into account and individuals financial, social, spiritual, cultural, occupational, physical, intellectual, environmental, and emotional wellbeing. Center staff will work to connect community members with housing resources, transportation assistance, therapy, and substance abuse support.

Participants will also be encouraged to participate in the Center's unique and broad offering of peer support groups and activities every month, with safe spaces for youth, elders, trans people, people of color and people in recovery, as well as a free food pantry open to Center participants.

San Francisco AIDS Foundation will contribute \$50,000 to the program to support the implementation of onsite HIV and STI testing. “We cannot end the HIV epidemic unless communities, and the organizations serving those communities, work together and support one another,” said Joe Hollendoner, CEO of SFAF. “That is why we are investing in the work of the Oakland LGBTQ Center to continue its positive impact on the health of LGBTQ people throughout the Bay Area. The only way to get to zero is together. With the support of Gilead, SFAF and other progressive funders, Oakland is entering a hopeful new phase in the fight against HIV, led by the communities most impacted by the disease.”

“San Francisco is a model of what is possible when substantial financial resources are consistently applied to meet the challenges faced by LGBTQ people at risk for or living with HIV.” Hawkins said. “Oakland has never had a place where all LGBTQ people could come together to build community, support one another and heal, until now. The Oakland LGBTQ Community Center is joining forces with other organizations to help Oakland become the first city to see a dramatic reduction of new HIV diagnoses, especially among African-American and Latin gay, bisexual, and transgender community members. Oakland can get to zero, but we will need all paddles in the water to steer us towards that goal.”

For more information about this new program, please contact Joe Hawkins at joe.hawkins@oaklandlgbtqcenter.org