

UW Health's World AIDS Day free community event

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LOFT in the Goodman Community Center, 149 Waubesa St, Madison, WI.

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MADISON- The good news: both the number and the rate of new HIV cases per year in Wisconsin has declined.

The bad news is that over the last decade, the number of HIV diagnoses in Wisconsin and nationwide has increased among young men, especially those of color. Just more than 40 percent of the 221 new HIV cases in 2016 were young men, ages 13-29, according to the latest Department of Health Services data.

HIV has a disproportionate impact on communities of color. In 2016, two-thirds of newly diagnosed cases of HIV in Wisconsin were people of color, yet people of color make up just 17 percent of the state's population. One in three (33 percent) black gay or bisexual men is estimated to be living with HIV in Wisconsin.

Faced with these challenges and in honor of World AIDS Day, the UW Health HIV/AIDS Comprehensive Care program will host a free public event Thursday, November 30 at the LOFT in the Goodman Community Center, 149 Waubesa St., from 5:30 to 8:30 PM.

The theme this year is "Young and Positive: An Intergenerational Dialogue on HIV." The evening will be a celebration and call to action, consisting of entertainment, information, discussion, and candlelight remembrance. The public is encouraged to attend.

"Though we do not hear as much about HIV as we did 20 years ago, people continue to acquire HIV daily. It is imperative that everyone, especially young

people, receive correct information about HIV, how it is transmitted, how it can be prevented, and its impact on health and quality of life,” said Dr. Sheryl Henderson, pediatric and adolescent HIV clinician with UW Health’s HIV/AIDS program. “Events such as this are very important toward that goal.”

The program’s keynote address will be from Adrian Nava, a nationally recognized youth HIV activist and organizer. He serves on the board of directors of Advocates for Youth and is a past recipient of the Pedro Zamora Young Leaders Scholarship. Adrian will reflect on how and why motivating youth to take action for their own health is key. This will be followed by an open dialogue with panelists and community members and performances from youth poets from The JVN Project and the Perfect Harmony Men’s Chorus. Light refreshments will be served.

People are living longer with HIV. Current HIV medication regimens are more effective and have substantially fewer side effects than early treatments, with many requiring just one pill a day. Women living with HIV can and do have healthy, HIV-negative babies. Individuals at risk for HIV can now take a daily medication that helps prevent infection.

But the picture is not perfect. A little more than half of people ages 13 to 24 with HIV are estimated to be unaware of their status. At the end of 2016, there were 6,923 people living with diagnosed HIV in Wisconsin and approximately 1,000 more living with HIV, but unaware of their status.

UW Health’s Comprehensive Care Program has been providing care for people with HIV/AIDS since 1985, and has sponsored a World AIDS Day event the past 14 years. World AIDS Day is Dec. 1. For more information, call (608) 265-8798.