The POZ 100 L-P

The 2021 list celebrates Black advocates.

November 15, 2021

Click here to read a digital edition of this article.

Introduction | A-C | D-K | L-P | R-Z

Kamaria Laffrey

Winter Haven, Florida

Kamaria Laffrey

Kamaria Laffrey is the program director for the Sero Project, an organization dedicated to ending HIV criminalization, racism and social injustice. She has been living with HIV since 2003 and courageously shares her story to help educate others, debunk HIV myths and fight HIV-related stigma and shame. Her compassion for others is one of her greatest attributes. She works with the Florida HIV Justice Coalition, the Florida Community HIV Advisory Group and United We Rise, which mobilizes for the health and liberation of Black people. Kamaria is a founding advisory board member of the Prevention Access Campaign and a member of PWN-USA. She’s happy to use her voice to make others feel less alone.

Maven Lee

St. Louis, Missouri

Maven LeeCourtesy of Maven Lee

Maven Lee knows how to have fun while empowering people. As an openly queer, two-spirit person of color living with HIV, he uses his music, dancing and status as a legend in St. Louis's ballroom scene to destigmatize HIV and help others love themselves. His charisma and honesty landed him on the second season of The Kiki Show (you can watch it on Vimeo for free!). He was also the Midwest Overseer of the House of Oricci on HBO Max's Legendary. Maven began his advocacy work as a sexual health educator for local schools—prior to his own diagnosis—and later became an HIV educator and prevention specialist. This savvy multitalented entertainer and entrepreneur regularly advises nonprofits on how to create support groups for cultivating mental wellness among LGBTQ youth and people living with HIV. (Click here to read more about Maven's advocacy in a special Focus from our sister publication Real Health.)

Rae Lewis Thornton

Chicago, Illinois

Rae Lewis ThorntonCourtesy of Rae Lewis Thornton

Rae Lewis Thornton is an Emmy-winning AIDS activist, author, blogger and jewelry designer who has been living with HIV for 36 years and with AIDS for 26. She lectures worldwide, challenging stereotypes and myths regarding the virus. She shared her story and disclosed her status on the cover of Essence magazine in 1994. An ordained minister, she has been featured in numerous publications and TV news shows. “There is still an enormous amount of stigma around this disease,” she said last year. “We’ve come a long way, but we still have so much further to go.” Her latest book, Unprotected: A Memoir, is out in December 2021.

Lil Nas X

Sherman Oaks, California

Lil Nas XFacebook.com/LilNasX

Sexual shame and religious persecution often lead to low self-esteem and high-risk behaviors. These destructive traits, coupled with socioeconomic factors, fuel HIV rates among same-gender-loving Black men—it's estimated that half of them will contract HIV in their lifetime. So when Lil Nas X slayed those homophobic demons in his hit video for "Montero (Call Me By Your Name)" by giving Satan a lethal lap dance, we applauded his unapologetic sex-positive message (we also love his clever clapbacks to haters). Then when his debut album, Montero, helped raise funds for HIV causes in the South, the epicenter of today's epidemic, the openly gay rapper had us shouting, to borrow from his recent hit, "That's what we want!"

Tiye Link

Nashville, Tennessee

Tiye LinkCourtesy of Tiye Link

Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, Tiye Link, EdD, MD, MBA, did not miss a beat. As the program director of Nashville CARES's Healthy University, a drop-in center for people with HIV, she collaborates with Nashville partners to offer a full calendar of meetings and events. Tiye has been involved in community ministry for more than 40 years. She is the founder and CEO of the consulting company Faith Connections and is a minister at the Nashville Church of the Messiah. She serves on the scientific review committee for the Vanderbilt Institute for Clinical and Translational Research and the End the Epidemic equity and leadership work group committee and formerly served on the steering committee of the Southeast AIDS and Education Training Center.

Donja R. Love

Jersey City, New Jersey

Donja R. LoveBill Wadman

Donja R. Love is an openly HIV-positive Afro-queer playwright, poet and filmmaker from Philadelphia. He is the author of the play one in two, about surviving and thriving as a gay Black man living with HIV. Trained at The Juilliard School, he is the recipient of the 2021 Terrence McNally Award, the 2020 POZ Award for Best Play, the 2018 Laurents/Hatcher Foundation Award and the 2017 Princess Grace Playwriting Award. His work has been developed at the Manhattan Theatre Club, Rising Circle Theater Collective, The Lark and The Playwrights Realm. Donja is the cofounder of The Each-Other Project, a digital media platform that celebrates and fosters community through art and activism for Black queer and trans communities. In 2020, he launched

the writing program Write It Out! (WIO!), specifically for people living with HIV; in 2021, with sponsorship from Billy Porter and GLAAD, he launched the WIO! Prize for playwrights living with HIV. (Click here to read an interview with Donja and POZ founder Sean Strub.)

Derrick Mapp

San Francisco, California

Derrick MappCourtesy of Derrick Mapp

Derrick Mapp is the senior services care navigator/counselor at San Francisco's Shanti Project, which is known for bringing people together in deeper connections to reduce isolation and improve their quality of life. He provides individual and group counseling and coordinates group activities for folks living with HIV. A longtime HIV and cancer advocate, Derrick is a member of the San

Francisco HIV Community Planning Council and is involved with the HIV Vaccine Trials Network, the AIDS Clinical Trials Group, the National Cancer Institute's AIDS Malignancy Consortium and the ANCHOR Study (which explored links between HIV, human papillomavirus and anal cancer). He works toward ensuring better engagement, mutual value and representation of diverse communities in research.

Darrell McBride

Danville, Pennsylvania

Darrell McBride Courtsy of Darrell McBride

As an infectious disease specialist at Geisinger Medical Center, Darrell McBride, DO, has worked tirelessly to support people living with HIV. In his brief time at Geisinger, he has helped start a

PrEP clinic, launched a Biktarvy sample program to ensure rapid treatment initiation among patients and helped expand services in his rural community, including hiring dedicated HIV case managers to help patients navigate the health care system. He volunteers as a member of the board of directors of AIDS Resource, the local AIDS service organization, and is the Black outreach and leadership development cochair at Geisinger. In 2016, he was the John Cochran Veteran Affairs HIV fellow in St. Louis. He is currently a member of the Infectious Disease Society of America, the HIV Medical Association and the International AIDS Society.

Shadawn McCants

Houston, Texas

Shadawn McCantsCourtesy of Shadawn McCants

Shadawn McCants, LPC-S, was named Shero of the Month earlier this year by PWN-USA for her efforts in boosting voter turnout in the 2020 election on behalf of Vote Positive USA. A licensed counselor, she was diagnosed with HIV during her senior year of high school and kick-started her HIV advocacy with the creation of the nonprofit 2 Know Is 2 Live, an organization that empowers Black women and girls to get tested for HIV. Since then, the Cincinnati native has become an active member of H-Town Power, the Houston chapter of PWN-Texas. She's the cochair of the Texas Black Women's Health Initiative and an ambassador for the CDC's "Let's Stop HIV Together" campaign.

Gerald McNair

Columbia, South Carolina

Gerald McNairCourtesy of Gerald McNair

Gerald McNair is a driven community activist and longtime volunteer for numerous organizations in South Carolina who has been living with HIV for 28 years. He’s on the board of Palmetto AIDS Life Support Services, the Harriet Hancock LGBT Center and the South Carolina Men of Color Health Alliance. He is also a member of South Carolina’s Ending the HIV Epidemic executive committee and the HIV Planning Council. Gerald was named as Thera’s Community Champion in May for his efforts to promote healthy outcomes in his community. He was also recently selected as an inaugural cohort member of the Southern Black Policy and Advocacy Network’s 2021 LEVEL UP Leadership Development and Capacity Building Initiative.

Marlene McNeese

Houston, Texas

Marlene McNeeseCourtesy of Marlene McNeese

A longtime veteran of the Houston Health Department, Marlene McNeese has held various public health positions, including chief of the Bureau of HIV/STD and Viral Hepatitis Prevention; she most recently served as the department's deputy assistant director. For more than 25 years, Marlene has played a leadership role in redefining public health and community-based support systems that address HIV prevention, chemical dependency, mental health and post-incarceration syndrome. She is a former board chair of the National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors (NASTAD) and this year was named cochair of the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS (PACHA).

Jesse Milan Jr.

Ellicott City, Maryland

Jesse Milan Jr.Courtesy of Jesse Milan Jr.

Jesse Milan Jr., JD began his tireless fight as an HIV advocate over 30 years ago. He's currently the president and CEO of the Washington, DC–based nonprofit AIDS United, which aims to end the HIV epidemic through policy, advocacy, strategic grant making and capacity building. He also spearheads AIDSWatch, an annual event that gathers advocates in Washington, DC, to lobby Congress and the White House to support HIV funding policies and services. Jesse is a former board member of the Black AIDS Institute and currently serves on the board of AVAC (the AIDS Vaccine Advocacy Coalition). He's on the scientific advisory board for the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and on the infectious disease board of the American Board of Internal Medicine. He has given hundreds of presentations, workshops and sermons on HIV/AIDS and has spoken about the disease to millions on television and radio.

Asha Molock

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania



Asha MolockCourtesy of Asha Molock

Twenty years ago, Asha Molock, a former schoolteacher, was diagnosed with HIV. She educated herself about the virus while keeping her status a secret. That is, until one day, she conquered her internalized stigma and wrote her first book, Gaining Strength From Weakness: 101 Positive Thoughts for HIV Positive People, based on the affirmations she used to write on Post-it notes to keep her spirits up. She followed that up with her memoir, The Underground Woman: From Prisoner to Freedom, detailing her journey from a middle-aged woman hiding her status to a vocal public advocate. These days, when she's not busy putting the finishing touches on her documentary film, Fuel for the Fire: HIV Stigma in the Black Community, she serves as a member of PWN-USA and on the community advisory board of Bebashi: Transition to Hope, an AIDS service organization in Philadelphia.

Deondre B. Moore

Dallas, Texas

Deondre B. MooreLynn Lane

Deondre B. Moore is a human rights activist who dedicates his time and resources to educating people all over the world about HIV and civil rights issues. He began his work in public health and advocacy after receiving an HIV diagnosis in 2014 at age 19. Since then, he has served on various national community advisory boards and as a community mobilizer in Texas. He is a pharmaceutical community engagement consultant. Deondre currently works as the U.S. partnerships and community engagement manager for the Prevention Access Campaign and appeared on the April/May cover of POZ this year.

Leo Moore

Los Angeles, California

Leo MooreCourtesy of Leo Moore

As the medical director for clinic services at the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, Leo Moore, MD, MSPHM, oversees eight public health centers specializing in HIV prevention, sexually transmitted infections, tuberculosis and refugee health. As a same-gender-loving Black man, Leo is concerned with stemming the spread of HIV among Black gay and bisexual men, who, according to the CDC, have a one in two risk of contracting HIV in their lifetime. In addition to connecting people with HIV to care, Leo educates medical providers about PrEP and has worked with the “Get PrEP LA” campaign to better market the preventive drug to those most at risk. This year, he took his extensive local experience national when he was sworn in as a member of

PACHA.

Abdul-Aliy Muhammad

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Abdul-Aliy MuhammadCourtesy of Abdul-Aliy Muhammad

Abdul-Aliy Muhammad, a Muslim journalist, poet and activist who has been living with HIV since 2008, writes about HIV and racial health disparities for The Philadelphia Inquirer and TheBody.com, among other news outlets. They are a cofounder of the Black and Brown Workers Co-op, a workers' rights group that has organized around gentrification and disrupting white supremacy in LGBTQ spaces. They have worked as an HIV prevention counselor and program coordinator and have also done research-based work. They once refused to take their HIV meds in order to

pressure the CEO and medical director of Philly's LGBTQ-serving Mazzoni Center to step down amid sexual misconduct allegations.

Terry W. Munn

Durham, North Carolina

Terry W. MunnCourtesy of Terry W. Munn

Terry Munn, MSM, is the CEO and cofounder of Triangle Empowerment Center (TEC), which provides an array of events and services to Durham's LGBTQ community—including HIV education and outreach and empowerment programs for people living with HIV—making it an essential hub for men of color who have sex with men (MSM). In collaboration with other organizations, TEC created the first minority MSM-based PrEP linkage to care program, which has become

instrumental in helping men of color in the Durham area learn about and get on PrEP. TEC was also a driving force behind North Carolina's first LGBTQ emergency/transitional housing program.

Chioma Nnaji

Boston, Massachusetts

Chioma NnajiCoutesy of Chioma Nnaji

As senior program director of the Multicultural AIDS Coalition, Chioma Nnaji is responsible for community-led research, capacity building, technical assistance and community mobilization. She's been working at the intersection of HIV, racial justice and immigrant rights for more than 20 years. She founded and currently directs the first state-funded program in Massachusetts that provides culturally and linguistically appropriate HIV outreach, education, testing and linkage to

care services to Black immigrants. She is #unbought #unbossed and #unapologetic in her passion to bring the voice and needs of African diaspora communities to the table.

Takeisha Nunez

Louisville, Kentucky

Takeisha NunezCourtesy of Takeisha Nunez

As the senior health education coordinator overseeing HIV and syringe exchange expansion through the University of Kentucky Harm Reduction Team, Takeisha Nunez is in charge of the only syringe exchange in Kentucky that’s open six days a week; she also oversees the downtown hub and seven satellite locations. In five years, the program has distributed more than 5 million syringes and served more than 20,000 injection drug users. Her team also provides HIV and

hepatitis C testing and has found innovative ways to continue testing and linking HIV-positive individuals to care during the COVID-19 pandemic. Takeisha previously worked on the Louisville HIV Prevention Team, which aims to stem the tide of HIV transmission among drug users. She serves on the board of Emmaus Ministries, Kentucky Health Justice Network and Kentucky AIDS Alliance and is a proud member of the Zeta Phi Beta sorority. She is trained in harm reduction, HIV counseling and testing, partner services and field investigation.

Bridgette Picou

Cathedral City, California

Bridgette PicouCourtesy of Bridgette Picou

Bridgette Picou is a licensed nurse and a prolific, hilarious and insightful writer who doesn't hold

back on what it’s like to be a woman living with HIV. She contributes to the A Girl Like Me blog for The Well Project, where she’s also a member of the community advisory board. She also writes a regular column titled “Being Bridgette” for Positively Aware and provides the activist’s perspective in the magazine’s annual HIV drug guide. Plus, she serves as board secretary for the HIV+ Aging Research Project–Palm Springs, which studies the impacts of long-term HIV and treatment on the natural aging process. In advocating for others, Bridgette finds she advocates for herself and affirms her own journey.

Harold Phillips

Washington, DC

Harold PhillipsOffice of Infectious Disease and HIV/AIDS Policy

Appointed in June by the White House to head the Office of National AIDS Policy, Harold Phillips is an openly gay Black man who has been living with HIV since 2005. He most recently served as the senior HIV adviser and chief operating officer of the Ending the HIV Epidemic initiative in the Office of Infectious Disease and HIV/AIDS Policy at the Department of Health and Human Services. His work in the field of HIV/AIDS spans more than 20 years. Harold previously worked at NMAC. He also served on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/Health Resources and Services Administration Advisory Committee on HIV, Viral Hepatitis and STD Prevention and Treatment from 2003 to 2010. (Click here to read our Q&A with Harold.)

Billy Porter

Bellport, New York

Billy PorterLev Radin/Shutterstock.com

In May, Billy Porter, longtime Broadway mainstay, HIV advocate and star of the TV series Pose, broke his 14-year silence on his HIV diagnosis, telling The Hollywood Reporter: “I’m living so that I can tell the story. There’s a whole generation that was here, and I stand on their shoulders. I can be who I am in this space, at this time, because of the legacy that they left for me. So it’s time to put my big boy pants on and talk.” After his disclosure, he released his own version of the 1990s house hit “Caught in the Middle” as a fundraiser for marginalized communities impacted by HIV. Billy shares his story of survival in Unprotected: A Memoir, which came out in October. We look forward to his next chapter.

Positively Positive

Seattle, Washington

Positively PositiveCourtesy of Positively Positive

Positively Positive, the founder of Positively Positive Education Productions, is a Black, queer, transgender, grey asexual, grey aromantic artist who has been living with HIV since birth and is a survivor of childhood violence. They write and perform spoken-word poetry and hip-hop and create workshops about living with HIV. For the past 25 years, they have facilitated programs and activities for children, youth and adults as a summer camp counselor and educator and as an advocate. They have also cofacilitated workshops on poetry, performance techniques and hip-hop for communities around the world. They aim to challenge institutions to build bridges for justice.

Cedric Pulliam

Atlanta, Georgia

Cedric PulliamCourtesy of Cedric Pulliam

As senior adviser for the chief medical officer at the Department of Health and Human Services and a former adviser at the CDC, Cedric Pulliam, PhD, ABPP, has 12 years of experience working in global health (HIV/AIDS, TB, malaria), global LGBTQ and human rights policy, public policy and public health. Recently, he completed his PhD in health and medical psychology, with a focus on the use of PrEP in young men of color who have sex with men—he's been taking PrEP himself since 2014. He also cofounded ECHO-VA with Deirdre Johnson, which modernized outdated and ineffective 1980s-era laws that criminalized HIV in Virginia.

Introduction | A-C | D-K | L-P | R-Z

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/2021-poz-100-l-p