The POZ 100 R-Z

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

Venita Ray

Houston, Texas

Venita RayCourtesy of Venita Ray

Venita Ray, JD, is the co–executive director of PWN-USA and has more than 20 years of experience advocating for underserved communities on issues such as affordable housing, environmental justice, health care and HIV. She previously served on PWN-USA's board. Before PWN-USA, Venita was the public policy manager for Legacy Community Health in Houston, where she monitored HIV-related health policy and managed an advocacy training program for people living with HIV. In 2016, she led a citywide effort to end the HIV epidemic in Houston. She appeared on the POZ cover for the 2017 POZ 100, which celebrated women.

Jay Reed

San Diego, California

Jay ReedCourtesy of Jay Reed

As a peer case manager at Christie's Place, where she has worked since 2010, Jay Reed is an amazing mentor and community advocate who has helped countless San Diego–area women living with HIV find their self-worth and confidence. She works daily to help women living with HIV overcome barriers that prevent them from accessing and retaining medical care. She spearheaded a special support group for women with HIV over age 50. Jay is a member of the San Diego HIV Planning Group, and is the chair of the Faith-Based Action Committee of San Diego, of which she's been a member since 2012. Through PWN, she provided feedback on the National HIV/AIDS Strategy to the federal government. In 2018, she won the Brad Truax Award, given annually in recognition of outstanding contributions in the struggle against HIV/AIDS in the San Diego area.

Lepena Reid

Tampa, Florida

Lepena ReidCourtesy of Lepena Reid

Lepena Reid was helping people living with HIV even before her own diagnosis in 1988. She’s a vibrant and vocal advocate for people aging with HIV who are living with comorbidities. She also speaks out in support of women living with HIV, women’s reproductive rights and survivors of intimate partner violence. Lepena has advocated to get more women of color involved in clinical trials and research. She’s a spokesperson for PWN-USA and was included in the 2018 POZ 100. For the past five years, she helped facilitate a national virtual support group for Black women living with HIV. As a member of Common Threads, a crafting collective of women with HIV, Lepena creates red ribbon earrings and other jewelry to raise HIV awareness and support.

Monica Lee Ridgeway

Frankfort, Kentucky

Monica Lee RidgewayCourtesy of Monica Lee Ridgeway

Monica Lee Ridgeway is the program manager, writer and creator of the innovative pilot program Kentucky Finding Cases Project. The program supports the national Ending the Epidemic plan by increasing HIV testing in rural areas considered hard to reach, increasing access to care to boost viral suppression rates among people living with HIV, addressing health inequities and raising awareness of PrEP. Monica is an advisory board member of the 2021–2023 Emory COMPASS Coordinating Center, where she works to address the HIV epidemic in the South. She was appointed as the 2020–2021 state representative for HIV advocacy focused on ending the epidemic. She also volunteers for the Life Development Corporation, a grassroots organization that

empowers people through educational and economic growth.

Bré Rivera

Albuquerque, New Mexico

Bré RiveraCourtesy of Bré Rivera

As a Black trans woman living with HIV, Bré Rivera is passionate about helping to fund organizations spearheaded by Black queer and trans people. That’s why she founded the Black Trans Fund, the nation’s first fund to center joy and liberation in Black trans and gender-diverse communities. (She also serves as the fund’s program officer.) Bré previously served as the executive director of Trans Sistas of Color Project, an organization she formed in Detroit. She worked as an HIV intervention specialist at Wayne State University of Medicine and as a research

assistant at the University of Michigan School of Public Health. She's on the boards of PWN-USA, Transgender Resource Center of New Mexico, Third Wave Fund and Grantmakers for Girls of Color. Plus, she currently serves as a U=U ambassador for the Prevention Access Campaign. She graced the cover of POZ in January 2020 and said, "I am unapologetically creating something for Black trans folks."

Ace Robinson

Long Beach, California

Ace RobinsonCourtesy of Ace Robinson

Veteran health equity administrator Ace Robinson, MHL, MPH, has been fighting for effective and equitable access to HIV education and treatment for people of color for nearly two decades. He

was an early and vocal proponent of the importance of treatment as prevention, especially for minority communities. He’s an original member of the U=U steering committee and a cochair of the Federal AIDS Policy Partnership, a national coalition of more than 120 local, regional and national organizations advocating for federal funding and legislation to end the HIV epidemic in the United States. He served as director of strategic partnerships for GMHC and led the Center to End the Epidemics at NMAC. He’s currently the chief mission officer of the COVID Clinic, which was founded by a group of individuals dedicated to providing COVID-19 testing for all.

Larry Scott-Walker

Atlanta, Georgia

Larry Scott-WalkerCourtesy of Larry Scott-Walker

Baltimore native Larry Scott-Walker is an author, poet and proud Black gay man living with HIV. His passion for helping others landed him at various community-based and AIDS service organizations, including AID Atlanta, before he cofounded, with Dwain Bridges and Daniel Driffin, Transforming HIV Resentments into Victories Everlasting Support Services (THRIVE SS), a support group for Black same-gender-loving men living with HIV. Larry is the group's executive director. Founded in 2015 and based in Georgia, THRIVE SS has branches in Tennessee, California, South Carolina, North Carolina and Washington, DC. The group provides both in-person and 24/7 online peer support services.

Jahlove Serrano

Staten Island, New York

Jahlove SerranoCourtesy of Jahlove Serrano

A Guatemalan-American Bronx native, Jahlove Serrano had a challenging childhood and was diagnosed with HIV at age 17. Today, he’s a youth advocate, health educator, model, runway coach, drag queen and all-around entertainer. He works with the New York AIDS Institute, National Gay Men’s Advocacy Coalition, the Global Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS and the White House. He currently appears in New York’s statewide “HIV Stops With Me” campaign. Jahlove is an ambassador for Positively Fearless, a Janssen campaign that promotes living your best positive life—and he’s proof that you can.

Curtis Smith

Hemet, California

Curtis SmithCourtesy of Curtis Smith

Curtis Smith is the founder and CEO of the Families Living with AIDS Care Center, an HIV services agency in Hemet, California, about two hours southeast of Los Angeles. He founded the agency in 2004, when he, his wife and his daughter were extremely ill due to AIDS. The family had been unaware of the availability of lifesaving services for too long, and Curtis was determined not to let anyone in need in the Inland Empire region suffer the same fate. He's currently the community cochair of the Inland Empire HIV Planning Council. Curtis says that, for him, serving others living with HIV is therapy. "When I'm helping others, I'm not thinking about myself and my pain," he says.

Charles Stephens

Atlanta, Georgia

Charles StephensCourtesy of Charles Stephens

Charles Stephens is the founder and executive director of the Counter Narrative Project, which works to shift perceptions about Black gay men to change policy and improve lives. He served as the organizer for the historic 2014 conference “Whose Beloved Community? Black Civil and LGBT Rights” at Emory University. He also led the innovative social marketing campaign “From Where I Stand” for AID Atlanta. He coedited the anthology Black Gay Genius, which was a finalist for the Lambda Literary Award. Charles has been a CDC Institute for HIV Prevention leadership fellow, an Arcus Foundation executive director fellow and a Rockwood Leadership Institute fellow for racial and gender justice leaders in the HIV/AIDS movement.

Krishna Stone

New York, New York

Krishna StoneBill Wadman

For nearly 30 years, Krishna Stone has worked with GMHC, the world's first provider of HIV prevention, care and advocacy. She began as a volunteer in 1993; in 2015, she was promoted to director of community relations, a position that keeps her busy writing media alerts, coordinating interviews and organizing community events. Her commitment to HIV advocacy has been recognized both locally and statewide. In 2021, Krishna told CBS, "As a straight ally, I think it's important for me to be of service, and that means to be of service to the LGBT+ community, to be of service to people living with and affected by HIV and AIDS."

Robert Suttle

New York, New York

Robert SuttleCourtesy of Robert Suttle

“HIV is not a crime!” For Robert Suttle, the phrase is more than a slogan or campaign to end HIV crime laws. In 2008, after a bad breakup, his former partner called the police and accused Robert, who is living with HIV, of not disclosing his status. Charged with a felony and incarcerated for six months in Louisiana, Robert emerged from the ordeal as an outspoken and knowledgeable activist about HIV criminalization (you’ll frequently find him speaking about the topic on panels and Zoom events). He is the chair of The Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation Council of Justice Leaders, an adviser for the HIV Justice Network’s Global Advisory Panel and a founding member of the Sero Project, which works to end HIV criminalization, mass incarceration, racism and social injustice.

Jasmine Tasaki

Memphis, Tennessee

Jasmine TasakiCourtesy of Jasmine Tasaki

In 2017, Jasmine Tasaki, a transgender woman of color, founded WeCareTN, a Memphis nonprofit that advocates for trans women of color who are current or former sex workers and provides direct programs and services. She uses harm reduction, healing justice and transformative justice frameworks in her work. She is the policy advocate for Black and Pink, a national prison abolition group focused on LGBTQ and/or HIV-positive people. Jasmine has worked as a PrEP navigator, HIV counselor, sexual health educator and cultural competency facilitator for the Memphis Police Department. She was also the first leader of trans experience in the National Urban League of Young Professionals and was previously an ambassador for the Black AIDS Institute. She stays grounded in hopes that her work can really impact the community.

LaDawn Tate

Detroit, Michigan

LaDawn TateCourtesy of LaDawn Tate

After attending a Positive Women's Health Speak Up Summit, LaDawn Tate was motivated to become more involved in HIV advocacy work. She currently cochairs the Southeastern Michigan HIV/AIDS Council, where she helped implement an HIV advocacy training program called Project LEAP (Learning, Empowerment, Advocacy and Participation). LaDawn is also an advocate for women living with HIV and formed a support group called Detroit RISE (Respect Is Empowerment), which helps women have conversations about their journey with HIV. An intervention specialist at Corktown Health Center, LaDawn says she will fight HIV until the very end.

Tyler TerMeer

Portland, Oregon

Tyler TerMeer Courtesy of Tyler TerMeer

Tyler TerMeer, PhD, aspired to have a career in theater, but after he tested positive in 2004, he dedicated himself to supporting and advocating for people living with HIV. Seventeen years later, he’s the chief executive officer of Cascade AIDS Project. The oldest and largest provider of HIV services in Oregon and Southwest Washington, Cascade AIDS is also the home of Prism Health, Oregon’s first federally qualified health center focused on LGBTQ+ people. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Tyler joined other Black leaders and Black-led organizations to create the Oregon Cares Fund for Black Relief and Resilience, a financial lifeline for the state’s Black community.

Marvell L. Terry II

Chicago, Illinois

Marvell L. Terry IIJonathan Timmes

A senior program manager for the Southern HIV Impact Fund at AIDS United, Marvell L. Terry II is a public health strategist, community builder and thought leader. A Memphis native, he began his HIV work linking newly diagnosed individuals to care and identifying and supporting those who had not been adherent to their health care plan. He is the founder of the annual Saving Ourselves Symposium, a conference for Black LGBTQ people living in the South that addresses the health and wellness of this population as well as the social injustices it faces. This brave gathering is now convened by the Southern AIDS Coalition. Marvell is the founder of BLK.Affirm, a digital mental health awareness initiative that reaches Black gay and same-gender-loving men. He previously founded The Red Door Foundation and Netherwood Consulting Group.

Kerry Thomas

Boise, Idaho

Kerry ThomasCourtesy of Kerry Thomas

In 2009, Kerry Thomas was sentenced to two consecutive 15-year sentences in prison for not disclosing his HIV status to a sexual partner who did not contract the virus from him. (He maintains that he was undetectable and used a condom.) Kerry has been an HIV decriminalization activist since 2014, when he spoke from prison via a TV feed at the first HIV is Not a Crime conference. He has also spoken to the media about care conditions for prisoners living with HIV. He has served on the board of the Sero Project since 2013 and in 2016 helped create a peer mentor program for newly arriving prisoners. In November 2020, Kerry's sentence was commuted; he will be eligible for parole in September 2023.

Alecia Tramel

Miami, Florida

Alecia TramelCourtesy of Alecia Tramel

When Alecia Tramel noticed that people living with HIV lacked social support, she created the Positive People Network in 2015. The organization provides opportunities for meaningful connections and networking through social activities meant to empower, strengthen and uplift people living with HIV. Alecia is currently the Florida state lead for PWN-USA. She's also a member of the Black Treatment Advocates Network, the Southern AIDS Coalition, the Florida Community Health Worker Coalition and the Florida HIV Justice Coalition. She is a blogger for The Well Project and was inducted into SisterLove's 2020 Leading Women's Society. Alecia fights HIV criminalization laws in her home state and works closely with homeless people. Those who know her describe her as a "powerhouse." We can see why!

Racquelle Trammell

Detroit, Michigan

Racquelle TrammellCourtesy of Racquelle Trammell

Miss Mouthy amplifies the voices of transgender women of color in Detroit. Hosted by the outspoken Racquelle Trammell, the podcast includes interviews with community leaders and offers listeners numerous HIV and health resources. As a researcher at the University of Michigan School of Public Health, Racquelle is a member of the Love Her Collective, a community-academic partnership between the school and the Trans Sistas of Color Project. She also helps women overcome trauma, including trauma related to HIV and stigma, through the intervention group Kickin' It With the Gurlz. As if that weren't enough, she's the proud mom of a 5-year-old daughter. "Everything I do," Racquelle says, "is for her."

Lynette Trawick

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Lynette TrawickCourtesy of Lynette Trawick

As a mother of 11 children, Lynette Trawick knows a thing or two about family life. And as the founder and ministry leader of I Am U, she uses her experience and wisdom to help guide and support women living with HIV as well as serodiscordant couples and children of parents who have been diagnosed with HIV. In addition to doing public speaking and facilitating workshops—she participated in Iris House's 2020 Women as the Face of AIDS Summit— Lynette documents the challenges she faces as a woman living with HIV online in her candid blog posts for The Well Project.

Masonia Traylor

Atlanta, Georgia

Masonia TraylorCourtesy of Masonia Traylor

Masonia Traylor is a community advisory board member of The Well Project, a long-standing nonprofit with a focus on women and girls living with HIV. She's also a member of the University of Houston's SUSTAIN Advocacy Group. Since her own diagnosis in 2010 at age 23, Masonia has served as a youth representative and volunteer for numerous organizations, including Georgia's Community HIV Prevention Planning Group, SisterLove, AID Atlanta and the Ryan White Planning Council. A much sought-after advocate and speaker and onetime PWN-USA Shero of the Month, she facilitates groups for women living with HIV and shares her own experiences as a mother living with the virus to help defeat the internalized stigma that keeps HIV-positive women from enjoying

the lives they deserve. She’s also the founder of Lady BurgAndy, a nonprofit that focuses on health and wellness initiatives for youth, women and people living with HIV/AIDS.

Joyce Turner Keller

Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Joyce Turner KellerCourtesy of Joyce Turner Keller

Joyce Turner Keller is an ordained archbishop who uses art, community organizing and theater to address stigma in churches across the country. She has lived with HIV for more than 20 years and is the founder and CEO of Aspirations, a nonprofit HIV service organization. Through her advocacy, she’s tested thousands of people and connected many to care. Joyce has led many conversations about the effectiveness of PrEP and the concept of U=U. She continues to educate Black people,

especially African-American women, about the importance of sexual health whenever and wherever she can. She was previously honored on the 2016 POZ 100.

Jason Walker

Brooklyn, New York

Jason Walker

Jason Walker began their career as an activist while protesting for racial justice as a student at the University of Louisville. After the murder of Trayvon Martin, they led a march and rally that gave rise to the development of the Louisville, Kentucky, chapter of Black Lives Matter. After their HIV diagnosis, they moved to New York City and began organizing at VOCAL-NY as the group's HIV campaign coordinator. Jason recently served as the senior grassroots coordinator at Health GAP

(Global Access Project). In 2019, their activism was recognized with the Ali Forney Center's 2019 Luminary Award. They are a leader within the house and ballroom community as a member of the Legendary House of Garçon (CDG Pro).

Dafina Ward

Bluffton, South Carolina

Dafina WardCourtesy of Dafina Ward

As executive director of the Southern AIDS Coalition, Dafina Ward is fighting the HIV epidemic in the South, which accounts for an estimated 51% of new HIV cases annually. She is passionate about uplifting the voices of people living with HIV and providing them with access to the resources they need. She was previously a project director at AIDS Alabama and served as the

organization’s director of prevention and community partnerships. In 2019, she helped launch the Southern HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, which is observed each August 20. Dafina believes it’s important to empower people to be their own advocates and to show them how to be involved in fighting and preventing HIV. “If we want to end the epidemic on a national level,” she says, “everyone has to care about what happens in the South.”

Darrell P. Wheeler

New Rochelle, New York

Darrell P. WheelerCourtesy of Darrell P. Wheeler

Darrell P. Wheeler, PhD, MPH, MSW, is a researcher with extensive experience in health disparities concerning Black MSM. He has led numerous HIV prevention and intervention studies, including

serving as protocol cochair for HPTN 061, a study to explore the feasibility of a peer health navigation intervention with Black MSM, and as principal investigator for Black Men Evolving (B-ME), a study evaluating locally developed HIV prevention interventions. Darrell currently serves as the provost and senior vice president of academic affairs at Iona College in New York and was named a member of the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS. Of his new appointment, he says, “I remain dedicated to promoting continued movement to end the AIDS epidemic and to promoting engagement of underrepresented minorities in HIV prevention sciences, care and treatment on an even larger scale.”

Phill Wilson

Los Angeles, California

BAI’s founder and former president and CEO Phill WilsonCourtesy of BFA.com/Tiffany Sage

Phill Wilson cofounded the Black AIDS Institute (BAI) in 1999 to, in his own words, “find a way to increase the engagement of Black communities in HIV/AIDS and take ownership of the pandemic in our communities.” He led the organization until the end of 2018, when he was succeeded by Raniyah Copeland, who was fired by the board last summer amid an ongoing dispute between the predominantly straight white male board and much of the broader Black HIV/AIDS community. In late August, Phill issued a statement urging that everyone remaining on the BAI board step down, to be replaced by Black people living with HIV and others who better represent the diversity of the HIV community. (Click here to read more about Phill’s work.)

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

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