The 2022 POZ 100 P-R

This year’s list celebrates Latino advocates.

November 14, 2022

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Andres Palencia

Los Angeles, California

Andres PalenciaCourtesy of Andres Palencia / Carlos Marin

Andres Palencia is the creator and director of My Health Agenda, a health and wellness web series that provides visibility to members of the LGBTQ Latino community while providing a safe space to address topics such as sexual and mental health. (Episodes are free to watch.) He also created Living y Ready, a series focusing on the experience of Latino LGBTQ+ folks living with HIV. Andres is also the CEO of LATV, a media company and national TV network that empowers Latino voices and celebrates Latino culture and LGBTQ pride. He is dedicated to addressing systemic inequity by providing opportunities to diverse creators, amplifying genuine content and advocating for better representation of Latinos in the media.

Alexander Perez

Washington, DC

Alexander Perez

Alexander Perez is a country program coordinator for the United States Agency for International Development’s (USAID) Office of HIV/AIDS, where he is responsible for coordinating the agency’s activities in Africa. His work prioritizes human-centered approaches to ensure that health equity and social justice remain at the forefront of public health efforts. In 2021, as a pediatric viral load surge consultant for USAID, he supported retention and viral load suppression activities for children and adolescents in low-and middle-income countries. Alexander was previously a manager at NASTAD, where he was part of the health equity and global program team. He also coordinated an NIH-funded multisite maternal and child health study in Cape Town. In his various

roles, he’s done work to address stigma and discrimination against sexual and gender minorities and people living with HIV through workshops, tool development and community engagement. He believes authenticity can be a tool to empower communities to lead and is proud to represent his Cuban roots in his work.

Alberto Perez Bermudez

Miami Beach, Florida

Alberto Perez Bermudez

Nicaraguan-born Alberto Perez Bermudez grew up on the streets of Los Angeles and Miami and

found out he was HIV positive when he was 18 years old. The former gang leader knew nothing about HIV but knew he had to make a change if he was going to survive, so he immediately set out to educate himself about the virus. Three decades later, the long-term survivor is an HIV advocate on social media and in his South Florida community. Alberto has appeared in several local health campaigns to fight stigma and encourage HIV testing. “I will do my best to help reduce other people’s exposure to HIV by providing the education I never got,” he says. “I will educate others until the day I die.”

Aracelis Quiñones

New York, New York

Aracelis Quiñones

Aracelis Quiñones is the coordinator of Poder Latino (Spanish for “Latino power”), part of the Latino Commission on AIDS. The group of HIV-positive Latinos meets monthly for training on AIDS policy and advocacy and on ways to take care of themselves in order to improve health outcomes and boost self-esteem. She is a survivor of not only HIV but also hepatitis C and cancer. She has educated Spanish-speaking communities about viral suppression and access to and retention in care and has helped develop information around promoting U=U, decreasing stigma and aligning HIV participants with their role in ending the HIV epidemic. The Puerto Rican–born advocate is a proud mother and grandmother.

Joey Pons

San Juan, Puerto Rico

Joey PonsCourtesy of Joey Pons / Jose Rodriguez Madero

Activism has been key to Joey Pons's survival. Diagnosed with HIV in 1988, he was an early member of ACT UP New York and a cofounder of Queer Nation, which fought for LGBTQ rights. He's currently the director of Puerto Rico's Housing Opportunities for People with HIV/AIDS (HOPWA) program. Over the years, Joey has worked on multiple political campaigns in Massachusetts, Texas, California and New Jersey as a political strategist, and he was one of the lobbyists for the Ryan White Care Act Reauthorization in 1996. He's collaborated with the Human Rights Campaign and the National Victory Fund and was part of the organizing committee for Stonewall 25. He's a member of NMAC's HIV 50+ Strong and Healthy program and the cochair of the host committee for the United States Conference on HIV/AIDS (USCHA) in Puerto Rico.

Valerie Reyes-Jimenez

New York, New York

Valerie Reyes Jimenez

Valerie Reyes-Jimenez went to Housing Works in New York City in August 1991 looking for housing for her and her family and has been with the organization ever since. These days, the longtime client and peer educator works full-time in the advocacy department as the New York City community organizer. Housing Works, which aims to end the dual crises of homelessness and HIV through advocacy and lifesaving services, recently honored Valerie with this year's Spirit of Housing Works award for her longtime service. She previously served on PACHA under President Bill Clinton and is a member of SisterLove's 2020 Leading Women's Society. She's a powerful

advocate because as she likes to say, “It’s my job to make things happen!”

Rosa Rivera Avilés

San Juan, Puerto Rico

Rosa Rivera Avilés

Since she was diagnosed with HIV in 1997, Rosa Rivera Avilés has dedicated her life to advocating for people with HIV, with a special focus on fighting the stigma associated with the disease. She is the Caribbean patient advocate for LatinX+, a grassroots network of advocates across the United States and Puerto Rico that addresses issues such as stigma, criminalization and immigration in

the Latino community as they relate to HIV. Rosa is also the director of Movimiento en Respuesta al VIH (Spanish for “the movement in response to HIV”) as well as the cofounder of Cero VIH PR, a group affiliated with the Sero Project, which is focused on ending inappropriate prosecutions of people living with HIV. She has served as a delegate at AIDSWatch, HIV is Not a Crime, PWN–USA’s Speak Up! Summit and USCHA. In 2018, she was named an NMAC HIV 50+ Strong and Healthy Scholar.

Gabriella Rodriguez

Orlando, Florida

Gabriella Rodriguez

The realization that women in the South face unique challenges regarding health information, testing and education prompted Gabriella Rodriguez to earn degrees in social work and nonprofit management from the University of Florida. She is the senior cochair for the Central Florida HIV Planning Council, a case manager for the Orlando United Resiliency Services and the executive director at QLatinx, a grassroots racial, social and gender justice organization dedicated to the advancement and empowerment of Central Florida's LGBTQ Latino community. While she acknowledges the tremendous odds facing the community in its struggle for equality and liberation, she is also hopeful about the future. "I believe in the work that's being done on a grassroots level to ensure our communities are informed, uplifted and given a platform to further create change as we build supportive infrastructure, address inequity and promote inclusionary practices for Black, Indigenous, queer and trans people of color within our communities," she says.

Natalia Rodriguez

Houston, Texas

Natalia Rodriguez

In 2021, Natalia Rodriguez, MPH, was named a CDC community ambassador, a role that supports the “Let’s Stop HIV Together” campaign and other CDC resources. She previously worked as a program manager for the Baylor College of Medicine Houston AIDS Education and Training Center, where she supported efforts to develop cultural sensitivity and HIV health trainings for Latino and transgender communities. Natalia also helped to develop the Houston/Harris County Rapid ART (antiretroviral therapy) Project ECHO (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes) among five Ryan White Part A clinics, which aimed to get people newly diagnosed with HIV on treatment as soon as possible. She is currently a board member of the Houston Global Health Collaborative and a mentor with the National Research Mentoring Network.

Carlos E. Rodriguez-Diaz

Washington, DC

Carlos Rodriguez Diaz

Carlos E. Rodriguez-Diaz, PhD, MPHE, MCHES, is a native of Puerto Rico and a bilingual/bicultural researcher with a background in community health. His work focuses on health inequities among populations made socially vulnerable, including people with HIV, Latinos, incarcerated people and LGBTQ folks. He’s an associate professor of prevention and community health at George Washington University’s Milken Institute School of Public Health and the director of the PhD program in social and behavioral sciences. He’s also the director of the Gill-Lebovic Center for Community Health in the Caribbean and Latin America. Carlos authored a study about the risk of

COVID-19 infection and death among Latinos in the United States and has done community-based participatory research in the United States, Puerto Rico and the Caribbean for over 15 years.

Maria Louise Roman-Taylorson

Los Angeles, California

Maria Louise Roman Taylorson Jonathan Timmes

Maria Louise Roman-Taylorson has been a leader in social services for the transgender community for over 20 years. As vice president and COO of the TransLatin@ Coalition (TLC), the largest trans-led organization in Los Angeles, the 51-year-old Puerto Rican is an outspoken activist and role

model to her community. Maria became the first transgender program manager for Transgéneros Unidas, a prevention program at Bienestar Human Services, the largest Latino HIV prevention program in the country. Earlier this year, she and TLC received a $10,000 grant from GLAAD via its partnership with Hornitos Tequila to continue to provide essential resources and empowerment to the LGBTQ community.

José A. Romero

Durham, North Carolina/Kennewick, Washington

José Romero

José A. Romero is an HIV, race and language consultant who splits their time between North Carolina and Washington. They were born to Mexican and El Salvadoran parents in Washington and spent their youth working on farms throughout the Northeast. They graduated from the University of Pennsylvania with a degree in cultural anthropology and after testing HIV positive in 2015 became a force in the battle for racial and language justice as it concerns the Latino community and HIV. After holding leadership positions at NMAC and the Latino Commission on AIDS, they are currently the director of community advocacy, education and research for the Pride Foundation as well as a board member at the LGBTQ Center of Durham and cochair of the Sustain Advocacy Group at the University of Houston. Because English was not their first language, language justice (the notion that folks should be able to communicate, understand and be understood in the language in which they prefer and feel most articulate and powerful) remains their priority. For their project A Pozitive Approach, they are recruiting multilingual people living with HIV to take part in advancing language justice in the public health sector.

Anthony Rosado

Brooklyn, New York

Anthony Rosado

Anthony Rosado is an interdisciplinary artist, activist and storyteller who uses their creative voice to speak up for the communities they represent. Their art also educates others about issues related to HIV advocacy, housing rights and cultural preservation. Anthony has participated in artist residencies, art exhibitions and performance-based series curated by the likes of Visual AIDS, Queer|Art, La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club, Center for Performance Research, Movement Research, Hemispheric Institute, Loisaida Center, El Museo de Los Sures, Bronx Academy of Arts and Dance and ARTs East New York. Next year, the Visual AIDS artist member will receive a master’s degree in American studies from Trinity College, with a graduate certificate in museums and communities.

Francisco Ruiz

Boston, Massachusetts

Francisco RuizKen Richardson

Hailed as a “real up-and-comer” in the inaugural POZ 100, Francisco Ruiz has now worked in the public health field for almost two decades, serving in roles for such organizations as the Peace Corps, NASTAD, the National Latino AIDS Action Network and the CDC, where he led the Vaccine Equity Coordination Unit and helped build trust in COVID-19 vaccines. As a Latino living with HIV, Francisco is transparent about his HIV status. While he believes people must prioritize their health over stigma, he acknowledges that disclosure is a choice and for various reasons is not always an option for some people. This year, Ruiz’s professional and lived experience will help inform his

pursuit of a doctorate at Harvard University’s T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

Ismael Ruiz

New York, New York

Ismael Ruiz

Ismael Ruiz found out he had HIV after his partner died of AIDS complications in the ’90s. Although it took him a while to come to terms with his diagnosis and access treatment, eventually, a mental health therapist referred him to The Alliance for Positive Change. Previously known as the AIDS Service Center, the New York City–based organization helps New Yorkers living with HIV and other

chronic health conditions get the medical care, peer support and housing assistance they need to achieve health, happiness and stability. Today, Ismael is a patient navigator and one of the agency's community member advocates. He empowers other patients with information, hoping they will pay it forward. "The knowledge that I'm bringing can help support the rest of the community and lead to other patients empowering themselves," he says. "It takes a village."

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