The 2022 POZ 100 S-Z

This year’s list celebrates Latino advocates.

November 14, 2022

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Bamby Salcedo

Los Angeles, California

Bamby Salcedo

A native of Guadalajara, Mexico, Bamby Salcedo is the president and CEO of the TransLatin@ Coalition, which addresses the needs of transgender, gender-nonconforming and intersex Latinas throughout the United States. In 2017, having recognized the need to deliver direct services such as case management, victim accompaniment and transportation to trans people, Bamby and her team opened the Center for Violence Prevention and Transgender Wellness, a multipurpose space for trans people in LA. Bamby, who has received many awards for her advocacy work and was the subject of the 2013 film Transvisible: Bamby Salcedo's Story, also had a hand in securing the 2020 passage of AB 2218, which established the Transgender Wellness and Equity Fund within California's Department of Public Health to fund health services for trans people. Most recently, she received the Distinguished Leader in Feminism Award from the UCLA Center for the Study of Women. "I am the CEO of a national advocacy organization," she said, during the award

presentation. “But my definition of the CEO is ‘community-elevated officer.’”

Gabriel San Emeterio

Brooklyn, New York

Gabriel San Emeterio

Born and raised in Mexico City, Gabriel San Emeterio, LMSW, is a queer activist committed to social and disability justice. They received their master’s degree in community organizing and program development from the Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College, and their work centers on policies and issues that impact the communities to which they belong: the LGBTQ

community (particularly trans and gender-expansive people), people living with HIV and low-income college students. They also live with myalgic encephalomyelitis and fibromyalgia and recently became involved in spreading awareness about the health implications of long COVID, particularly for those living with HIV and other chronic viral diseases, through the Network for Long COVID Justice and as the cofounder of Strategies for High Impact. The group produces groundbreaking research, holds informational webinars and organizes community activism and advocacy on the COVID-19/long COVID pandemic.

Charles Sanchez

Queens, New York

Charles SanchezBill Wadman

Charles Sanchez was diagnosed with AIDS in 2003. A Mexican American, he became an activist via his groundbreaking musical comedy web series, Merce, which he wrote, produced and starred in as a response to the dearth of modern HIV stories in mainstream media outlets. The series, about a man living with HIV who isn't sad, sick or dying, garnered many awards and accolades, including one for Charles for Best Actor in a Web Series at the Official Latino Short Film Festival. Charles also created The More You Can Ho, a series of cheeky sex-positive videos for YouTube designed to shatter HIV stigma. He is a contributing editor for TheBody.com and a contributing writer for POZ, and his writing has also been featured on Them.us, PositivelyAware.com and HuffPost Queer Voices. Since 2020, he has hosted the popular TheBody.com Instagram broadcast At Home With, on which he chats with celebrities and members of the HIV and LGBTQ communities.

Li Ann Estrella Sánchez

Atlanta, Georgia

Li Ann Estrella Sánchez

Mexican-born activist Li Ann Estrella Sánchez survived abuse and violence in her own country as well as in the United States before settling in Atlanta. She was detained by U.S Immigration and Customs Enforcement in 2012 and held for a year in isolation as she sought asylum for persecution as a trans woman. Her case made national news and she won her legal battle in 2018. Today, Li Ann is the CEO of Community Estrella, a nonprofit that advocates for the rights of trans Latina women in the Southern United States—a population that has a disproportionately higher risk for HIV. The organization supports some 250 people by providing a shelter for trans women, transition programs, talks and community and political advocacy. It aims to defend, organize and empower the trans and gender-nonconforming community.

Julia Sanchez

Brooklyn, New York

Julia Sanchez

Long-term survivor Julia Sanchez is a client support specialist at The Family Center (TFC), a Brooklyn-based organization that strengthens families affected by crisis, illness or loss to create a more secure present and future for their children. Julia, who has worked for TFC for 18 years, facilitates the organization’s The Positive Life Workshop, a seven-session program—run by and for people living with HIV—that helps people living with HIV build the skills and community they need to improve and maintain their health. Julia and her fellow facilitators (like Matthew Marrero, also on this year’s list) create an energetic and welcoming environment that provides hope for those living with HIV.

Natalie Sanchez

Los Angeles, California

Natalie Sanchez

With a background in program development, project management and community planning, Natalie Sanchez, MPH, has dedicated 18 years of her career to reducing the spread of HIV and improving medical outcomes in Latino communities. She currently sits on the community advisory board for the State of California Office of AIDS Planning Group, UCLA's Center for HIV Identification, Prevention and Treatment Services and the National Latinx HIV Conference Committee. She's also on NMAC's Latinx constituent advisory panel. A third-generation Mexican American, Natalie hopes

to shift cultural norms regarding female roles, oppressive issues, sexuality, gender identity and addiction. Natalie is the director of the Los Angeles Family AIDS Network at UCLA, which provides family-centered HIV services with a focus on prevention of mother-to-child transmission. She created the award-winning telenovela web series Sin Vergüenza (Spanish for “no shame”), and as a writer and filmmaker, she uses her platform to spread public health messages and showcase communities of color.

Jonathan Santos-Ramos

New York, New York

Jonathan Santos Ramos

Taking over the helm of Callen-Lorde, a New York City–based community health center steeped in LGBTQ history, is no easy task, but interim executive director Jonathan Santos-Ramos, a bilingual leader who has spent the past 14 years in various senior roles within the organization—including in clinical operations, education, community engagement and strategic initiatives—is clearly no stranger to the center's work and mission. Jonathan previously worked for the Community Healthcare Network, where he opened a health center that tripled in size under his guidance. He also served as deputy director of business systems and strategy for New York City's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene Bureau of HIV Prevention and Control. With his background, the ship seems to be in good hands.

Tony Valenzuela

Los Angeles, California

Tony ValenzuelaCourtesy of Tony Valenzuela / P. James Melikyan

Tony Valenzuela has been a leading activist and thought leader in the HIV community since the ’90s. He was named to Out magazine’s annual OUT 100 list in 1997 and appeared on our February 1999 cover. Recently named executive director of ONE Archives Foundation, the oldest continuously active LGBTQ organization in the country, Tony is the first Latino person to hold this position in its 70-year history. He most recently served as the executive director of the Foundation for the AIDS Monument. Tony, who has a background in literature and creative writing, has published numerous short stories, articles and essays. He was also the executive director of Lambda Literary, where he founded the LGBTQ Writers in Schools program, the first queer educational initiative in the K–12 New York City public school system.

Silvia Valerio

Los Angeles, California

Silvia Valerio

Silvia Valerio was living in Mexico City when she was diagnosed with HIV in 1991. For nearly two decades, she devoted time to HIV advocacy and prevention, notably for the Latino community and for women. (Her daughter is fellow POZ 100 honoree Grissel Granados.) Since 1997, she has worked at the nonprofit AIDS group Bienestar, where she's currently the linkage to care coordinator and focuses on providing HIV prevention and education to the LGBTQ community by providing direct services. She's also the community advisory board coordinator for Bienestar's Transformando Vidas support group for vulnerable populations. In 2019, Silvia was part of the inaugural cohort of NMAC's Reclaiming Our Place at the Table program, which encourages

participation in local End the HIV Epidemic efforts. She's also part of NMAC's ELEVATE training program.

Milani Varela

Chicago, Illinois

Milani Varela

Milani Varela is a fierce, gender-nonconforming drag performer and activist who is the reigning Miss Diosa Latina for Illinois and a former Miss Latina Continental Plus. A former mother of the iconic Legendary House of Ninja, Milani has used the ballroom and pageant platforms to spread

HIV awareness, education and prevention since 2008. She served as the program coordinator for the MPowerment Project for VIDA/SIDA at the Puerto Rican Cultural Center and later as the manager of community education and outreach. She has delivered presentations on best practices for disseminating information about PrEP, PEP, HIV vaccines and rectal microbicides to the Latino community and was an ambassador for the CDC's "Let's Stop HIV Together" campaign. Currently, Milani is an HIV tester and educator at CALOR (Comprensión y Apoyo a Latinos en Oposición al Retrovirus—"understanding and support for Latinos fighting the retrovirus," in English), which supports Latinos living with or affected by HIV. Plus, she was a social media fellow for USCHA.

Steven Vargas

Houston, Texas

Steven VargasCourtesy of Steven Vargas / Marie de Jesus

HIV has affected Steven Vargas in devastating ways. He tested positive in the spring of 1995, the same year he lost his stepfather and beloved mother to AIDS. A self-described “reluctant activist,” Steven has grown to be a giant in the HIV community, both in his native Texas and nationally. He was the cochair of the City of Houston’s Hepatitis C Task Force and chair of Houston’s Latino HIV Task Force and Houston’s Ryan White Planning Council. He’s currently the cochair of the National HIV Aging and Advocacy Network, a program that supports people living with HIV over 50. In 2008, he joined the Association for the Advancement of Mexican Americans and developed two case management programs to expand access to housing and housing services for people living with HIV. He has worked with national organizations and agencies, including NMAC and the Department of Health and Human Services.

Nelson Vergel

Houston, Texas

Nelson Vergel

A Venezuelan native and longtime survivor, Nelson Vergel is a chemical engineer and treatment guru who founded the Program for Wellness Restoration in Houston to help improve the quality of life of people living with HIV. His online mailing list reaches people nationwide looking for treatment updates and insights. He is a particularly vocal proponent of salvage therapies for people who, like him, experience multidrug resistance. He is CEO of Discounted Labs.com and ExcelMale.com, which provide safe, moderated platforms for men to exchange evidence-based

health information. Nelson’s personal success fighting wasting syndrome through the use of testosterone as well as anabolic steroids prompted him to write various books on their safe use, including Testosterone: A Man’s Guide and Beyond Testosterone.

Luís Villanueva

Cathedral City, California

Luís Villanueva

Luís Villanueva is a peer facilitator of the Let’s Kick ASS Palm Springs (LKAPS) Roundtable, a weekly drop-in discussion group where long-term HIV survivors can make connections and build

community through conversations. Created to address isolation and depression common in older adults living with HIV, LKAPS seeks to reduce the stress of aging with HIV by providing an opportunity to develop friendships and community. With help from a grant from Equality California, Luís also founded and runs Amigos Coachella Valley, a peer support group for Latino men with questions about sexual and mental health, male sexuality, Latino cultural heritage, HIV prevention and treatment and more.

Maria I. Wilson

Houston, Texas

An immigrant from Mexico and the first in her family to graduate from college, Maria I. Wilson, EdD, LMSW, LVN, is an assistant professor at the college of human sciences and humanities at the University of Houston–Clear Lake, Texas. She's also the project coordinator for the SMART Cougars (Substance Use, Mental Health, and HIV/AIDS Risk Assessment and Testing), which aims to prevent and reduce substance misuse and the transmission of HIV among Latino and African-American college students at the University of Houston and the surrounding community. Maria is also the program manager for the SUSTAIN Wellbeing COMPASS Coordinating Center of the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work, one of three centers working to address HIV in the South by focusing on mental health, trauma-informed care, substance use and wellness.

Richard L. Zaldivar

Los Angeles, California

Richard L. Zaldivar

Native Angeleno Richard L. Zaldivar began working in public service at age 17 as the president of a local youth group. Today, as the founder and executive director of The Wall Las Memorias Project (TWLM), he oversees programs that promote wellness and prevent illness among Latino, LGBTQ and other underserved populations in Los Angeles. Under his stewardship, the organization—which was formed in 1993—facilitated the construction of the only national publicly funded AIDS Monument. A lifelong Dodgers fan, Richard also helped create Strike Out AIDS, an annual event that raises HIV awareness at Dodger Stadium. In 2020, TWLM launched “Act Now Against Meth,” a campaign to address the methamphetamine epidemic in Los Angeles. TWLM’s goal is to provide wraparound health services—while also addressing issues like substance misuse, racial and gender disparities, homophobia and transphobia—and to provide leadership opportunities to young members of the LGBTQ community.

José M. Zuniga

Washington, DC

José M. ZunigaCourtesy of IAPAC

José M. Zuniga, PhD, MPH, is the president and CEO of the International Association of Providers of AIDS Care (IAPAC), which represents more than 30,000 clinicians and allied health care professionals worldwide. IAPAC also serves as the secretariat for the Fast-Track Cities Institute, which supports a network of more than 400 cities striving to end their HIV epidemics by 2030. The institute is part of a consortium of community, medical and urban health organizations that formed to create #ZeroHIVStigmaDay, a new awareness day (July 21) that calls attention to the persistent

stigma experienced by people living with and affected by HIV. José is also a member of the IAPAC Board of Trustees as well as the National Hispanic Medical Association and an editor emeritus of the Journal of the International Association of Providers of AIDS Care.

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