Raise Your Glass!

As three iconic HIV groups celebrate three decades, their leaders talk with POZ about past accomplishments and future goals.

June 22, 2015 By Trent Straube

AIDS Foundation of Chicago (AFC), John Peller, President & CEO
Greatest accomplishment: We began work toward our greatest accomplishment—to coordinate and advocate for care, housing and prevention for people living with and vulnerable to HIV across Illinois—on AFC's very first day, and every subsequent day's successes build upon this achievement.

Biggest change: In AFC's earlier years, attention was focused on better understanding and managing this disease. In more recent years, HIV apathy has been a barrier that pushed us to raise awareness in the most vulnerable communities in Chicago (such as young gay black and Latino men and transgender people).

What's next: We will be leading citywide campaigns to tell people who most need PrEP about this unprecedented prevention regimen. We will continue to connect HIV-vulnerable people to health care plans through the Affordable Care Act. We will fight for support in Springfield and Washington, DC, for people living with HIV, and we will build on our relationships with Chicago's and Illinois's most vulnerable communities so that together we can end new HIV cases once and for all.

God's Love We Deliver, Karen Pearl, President & CEO
Greatest accomplishment: Our ability to continue meeting the needs of our growing and changing client base, always free of charge for the client, and without a waiting list.

Biggest change: God's Love We Deliver started as an HIV/AIDS organization, bringing meals to homebound New Yorkers living with HIV/AIDS. In 2001, we expanded our mission and now serve people living with more than 200 unique diagnoses who each need individually tailored meals to meet their specific medical situations.

What's next: We will return to our SoHo home [later this year after completing major renovations], and we will increase the number of meals we cook and deliver—we will be able to more than double our capacity. We also look forward to continuing our advocacy for food and nutrition services in health care reform.

Project Inform, Dana Van Gorder, Executive Director
Greatest accomplishment: We, along with ACT UP and TAG, assured that people with HIV were involved in every aspect of bringing treatments to market, and we assured that pharmaceutical companies were accountable. And Martin Delaney, Project Inform's founder, pressured the FDA to permit access to experimental medications for people so ill they could not wait for final approval.

Biggest change: Beginning in 2007, Project Inform pressed for recognition of the role of HIV treatment as prevention by encouraging both earlier treatment and pre-exposure prophylaxis, or PrEP. In 2007, Project Inform began advocacy for a heightened national response to the hepatitis C epidemic—up to one-third of HIV-positive people have hepatitis C.

What's next: Developing a research agenda to strengthen the implementation of biomedical HIV prevention. Also advocating to end discriminatory insurance industry practices that limit access by people with HIV and hepatitis to medications. And achieving greater progress toward the identification of a cure for HIV.

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