A Day to Honor HIV Long-Term Survivors

The commemoration was established in 2014.

August 17, 2026 By Trent Straube

Friday, June 5, marked HIV Long-Term Survivors Awareness Day (HLTSAD) 2026. The date coincides with a historical milestone in the history of the AIDS epidemic. On June 5, 1981—45 years ago—the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR), a publication of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, first reported on cases of a mysterious illness affecting young gay men; the disease soon became known as AIDS, which is caused by untreated HIV.

HIV Long-Term Survivors Awareness Day was established in 2014 by Let's Kick ASS—AIDS Survivor Syndrome. As its organizers write on HLTSAD.org:

#HLTSAD honors and uplifts the resilience of those who have lived with HIV since before 1996—before effective treatments existed. It shines a light on their enduring strength, lived experience and vital role in shaping the ongoing fight for justice, care, and dignity….

It's a day to honor long-term survivors of HIV and raise awareness about their needs, issues, and journeys….

We make up about 25% of all people living with HIV and AIDS. 1.2 million people are living with HIV in the U.S. That makes about 330,000 long-term survivors, defined as individuals who acquired HIV before 1996 and the introduction of [highly effective HIV treatment].

Often overlooked, HLTS includes people born with HIV or who acquired the virus as babies and are now in their 30s and 40s. HLTS are also those living with HIV and AIDS for over 25 years.

It's up to us to set our action plan addressing the present-day and future needs, issues, and challenges facing people living longest with HIV/AIDS.

HLTSAD is not a time to look back at our traumatic pasts. (That's for World AIDS Day.) Our goal over the coming months is for YOU to set our agenda and priorities for moving forward and take action to make changes.

People living with HIV/AIDS deserve to age with dignity.

In the past year, the National AIDS Memorial highlighted the experiences of long-term survivors as part of its ongoing Surviving Voices series. (You can watch the video on the National AIDS Memorial's YouTube channel.)

The series also includes mini documentaries with several long-term survivors, who share their insights into decades of navigating the physical, social and emotional challenges of living with HIV.

A few examples include Tez Anderson, who founded Let's Kick ASS, Vince Crisostomo, the director of aging services at San Francisco AIDS Foundation, and Paula Ray-Hinton.

In related news, to coincide with the June 5, 1981, debut report on AIDS, two long-term survivors—Cleve Jones and POZ founder Sean Strub—launched the nationwide call to action Seven Days in June: Health Is Primary.

Sean StrubBill Wadman

Cleve JonesAngela DeCenzo

Seven Days in June: Health Is Primary was a decentralized, grassroots campaign laser-focused on the issues of affordability and healthcare, dual issues that have galvanized special elections and primaries during the last year and served as linchpins for successful campaigns across the political spectrum.

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