Get to Know Raniyah Copeland

Three questions for the new president and CEO of the Black AIDS Institute

February 18, 2019 By Trent Straube

Congratulations on your new post! What are your organization's top priorities for 2019?

It is an exciting time here at BAI! There have been critical advances in HIV treatment and prevention in recent years, yet Black people have not benefited as much as other folks. There are huge threats in both the political and cultural landscape as well as a false perception that the epidemic has ended. Our vision for the Black AIDS Institute of tomorrow is an organization that is deeply entrenched in the community, providing services at all points of the care continuum along with a well-respected research, policy, mobilization and capacity-building portfolio that is uniquely and unapologetically Black.

Tell us about a program at the Black AIDS Institute you'd like to highlight.

We recently launched the Ambassador Program for Black women to build engagement and movement around HIV and sexual health. The Ambassador Program is a cohort of 20 Black cis and trans women—[some are living with HIV and some are not]—who will receive training about HIV and sexual health. These women will utilize social media to expand knowledge of and access to biomedical tools among Black women [such as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and treatment as prevention (TasP)]. The program will destigmatize conversations about sexual health and HIV, normalize utilization of biomedical interventions among Black women and build power among the women ambassadors and their social networks. The cohort will be announced on National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day [marked on March 10].

What draws you to this work?

I was raised by radical Black parents who instilled in me that honoring the lives of my elders who struggled and sacrificed for my freedoms meant that I too had to struggle and fight to gain freedoms for myself and other Black people. Ensuring that Black people are able to live long, healthy lives has always been my passion. Out of undergraduate school, I was working at Planned Parenthood, where I conducted HIV testing. I gave my first HIV diagnosis to a young Black gay man, and I'll never forget the inevitability of HIV acquisition and hopelessness he told me he felt upon his diagnosis. The lives of Black folks living with HIV matter to me. The lives of Black gay men matter to me. The lives of Black trans women matter to me. The lives of Black people matter to me. None of us are expendable. I'm honored to fight for the many, many people who are no longer here to fight and to be in a movement that epitomizes freeing people from HIV and AIDS

regardless of their race, class, gender or who they love.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/get-know-raniyah-copeland