Long-Term HIV Survivors in San Francisco Need Housing Support

In San Francisco, the first generation of long-term HIV survivors are calling for more support in housing, medical and social services.

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Thanks to medical advancements, people with HIV are living longer and healthier. In cities with large HIV communities, resources need to be reallocated to services for aging adults with HIV. That was the message of HIV advocates and long-term survivors who took their concerns to San Francisco's board of supervisors last month to call for more money to support the 11,500 people over age 50 living with HIV in the city, reports San Francisco Public Press.

"I was supposed to not be here," said Jerry Cuffey, 74, who was diagnosed with HIV 38 years ago, told the board. "Help me keep going."

His experience is not uncommon. More people with HIV are living past the age of 50. In fact, most recent national dataput 54% of people living with HIV in the United States in 2022 over age 50. In San Francisco, rates are much higher. San Francisco's HIV epidemiology annual report from 2024 found that 75% of people living with HIV were older than 50, and 29% were 65 or older.

People aging with HIV share many of the same health concerns as the general population that's growing older, such as dealing with multiple chronic diseases or conditions, taking multiple medications, experiencing changes in physical and cognitive abilities and feeling more stressed. However, people with HIV also face increased health risks for many non-AIDS associated conditions, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, renal disease and cancer, according to HIV.gov. People with HIV experience greater inflammation, higher risk of infection, mental health issues and substance use disorder.

To learn more about the effects of HIV on the nervous system, check out POZ's Basics on HIV and Your Brain.

What's more, older adults living with HIV often encounter unique barriers to healthcare and stable housing—and at younger ages than their HIV-negative counterparts. For example, they may require ADA-accessible housing, which can be scarce.

"Many face an earlier onset of mobility limitations and rely on extremely limited incomes. Social supports are often minimal or entirely absent, increasing the risk of isolation and reducing access to informal help," said Manuel Vasquez, housing programs manager at the Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development.

Pleas from long-term survivors and HIV advocates were successful, and the city's Department of Disability and Aging Services proposed a $150,000 investment dedicated to older adults with HIV. Though, as long-term survivor Cuffey pointed out to the Board of Supervisors, the proposed funds would allocate just $13 per person living with HIV over age 50.

"Many of these folks acquired HIV in the early days of the epidemic and have, frankly, been through hell to get here," Jonathan Frochtzwajg, director of health justice policy at the San Francisco AIDS Foundation, told the Public Press. "We in particular owe it to this population to ensure that their needs are getting met in their golden years."

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