



Many Thanks

In a blog post titled “Thank You,” NMAC executive director Paul Kawata expresses his gratitude for the over 3,000 attendees at the 2022 United States Conference on HIV/AIDS (USCHA). Here is an excerpt.

January 9, 2023 By [Paul Kawata](#)

Thank you for joining us in San Juan. NMAC is very grateful. While the meeting was relatively smooth, getting there was tough. Over 3,000 folks showed up for Puerto Rico. Mark your calendars now for the 2023 USCHA in Washington, DC, from September 6 to 9, 2023.

Life is hard. Every week, it seems like another shoe drops. COVID-19 and politics have stolen our swagger. Just when it seemed like we might have to cancel, there was a clearing. Our movement needed to meet to remember why we do this work, to listen and learn from colleagues across the country, reconnect with old and new friends and heal our souls. Thank you for showing up because the work is not over.

NMAC is already working on the 2023 meeting. Next year, we’ll have a special tribute to Anthony Fauci, MD. Honestly, he was hesitant to be honored. I let him know it’s not for him. The HIV movement needs to say thank you. He understood. His only request is that we don’t embarrass him. I do hope we can surprise him. Our movement and the world owe him a huge debt. His was the voice of sanity during very uncertain times.

Part of what makes USCHA and the HIV movement so unique is the active voice of community, particularly people living with HIV. NMAC asked the members of the amazing Puerto Rico host committee to tell the story of their people. Please appreciate the vulnerability it takes to speak your truth. When the local host committee said to move forward, NMAC knew we had to fight for Puerto Rico like we fight for all the communities highly impacted by HIV.

While we would never knowingly put constituents in danger, our movement needed to meet. I am an old man who missed my family. The hugs and gratitude were genuine. They meant the world after all the traumas of the last three years. USCHA brings together and builds a movement of diverse communities, where all the people highly impacted by HIV are celebrated.

During USCHA, \$20,770 was raised for the local HIV group Coaí to support people living with the virus who were impacted by Hurricane Fiona. NMAC will match this amount and thanks all the people who supported people living with HIV in Puerto Rico during this difficult time.

There would be no USCHA without sponsors. Their support provides hundreds of scholarships to ensure diversity and representation. Working with industry is a difficult balance, and I expect community to hold us accountable. At the same time, I really need to thank our sponsors.

I've been taking NMAC staff to meetings with donors to give them an experience of the difficult position of saying, "Thank you, but you need to do more." That is also NMAC's role with the federal government.

Now that Fauci's leaving, I think I'm the oldest queen in the room. I have a responsibility to say thank you and to say the difficult things that others might not share. We will never end the HIV epidemic by 2030 without pushy visionary queens and money. Thank you to our 2022 sponsors, and we need more in 2023.

This year's meeting was an opportunity to celebrate our Latinx staff, board and community advisory members. They have fought for years to bring this meeting to Puerto Rico. As noted earlier, this year was tough. Thank you for hanging in there through the insanity of too many challenges.

If it weren't for NMAC staff, particularly our conference staff, the meeting would not happen.