



Remembering Princess Diana's AIDS Work 20 Years After Her Death

At the height of AIDS fears, she showed that it was OK to hug people with HIV.

August 31, 2017

Twenty years ago, on August 31, 1997, Princess Diana died following a car crash in Paris. She was 36 and had rarely been out of the global spotlight since marrying Prince Charles in 1981. But the British royal was much more than a style icon and celebrity gossip mainstay. The Princess of Wales helped break down AIDS stigma and raise awareness of the epidemic.

In April 1987, for example, she officially opened Britain's first AIDS ward, at London Middlesex Hospital. As the [BBC reports](#), before the event, media outlets speculated about what she would wear—specifically, whether she would don protective gloves. At the time, many people feared HIV could be spread through casual contact. To teach the public otherwise, Diana did not wear gloves. She shook hands with a man who had AIDS. Images of that handshake helped change attitudes about HIV.

Similar scenarios replayed over the years, notably at a pediatrics ward in Harlem, New York, in 1989, where she held a boy with AIDS in her arms, and at Casey House, an AIDS hospice in Toronto, in 1991.

Thks to all who recognized this wk's 25th anniversary of
Princess Diana's landmark Casey House visit

[@HenryOfWales](https://t.co/KZY4Amt9Fd)

<pic.twitter.com/AbrykGZ6UH>

— Casey House (@caseyhouseTO) [October 27, 2016](#)

You can watch a CNN video about her memorable AIDS contributions [here](#), including a speech in which she stated: "HIV does not make people dangerous to know, so you can shake their hands

and give them a hug. Heaven knows they need it.”

Known for her humanitarian work, including efforts to ban landmines, Princess Diana was a patron of the [National AIDS Trust](#) (an HIV organization) in the United Kingdom, where she attended events, delivered speeches and raised awareness since 1990.

At her funeral, Sir Elton John performed his 1973 song “Candle in the Wind.” He then released the new version, which, [according to Forbes](#), remains the best-selling chart single of all time. Proceeds of the song—it has sold more than 33 million copies worldwide—go toward Princess Diana’s charities.

Today, her legacy of AIDS advocacy lives on in her children, notably [Prince Harry](#) who has taken a series of HIV tests in public to raise awareness and who does HIV-related charity work in [Lesotho](#).

As [The New York Times noted](#) this week, younger people today, even in Britain, don’t seem to know much about Princess Diana—except how she died and who her children are. Perhaps the 20th anniversary tributes will rekindle her light.

If you want to learn more about Princess Diana, check out the four-hour documentary produced by ABC and People magazine and titled [The Story of Diana](#).