Revealing HIV Stats—and Torsos Too!

The “#uncoverHIV” campaign reaches a U.S. region that the CDC rates as high risk for both HIV and hepatitis C.

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POZ readers are likely aware that “it can take years for HIV to develop symptoms,” but did you know that “8 of the 10 most vulnerable counties in the U.S. for an HIV outbreak are in Kentucky” and that “African Americans are the racial/ethnic group most affected by HIV”? Residents of Lexington, Kentucky, are learning these and other HIV-related facts thanks to the testing and awareness campaign “#uncoverHIV.”

Central to the campaign are photographer Brett Barnett’s images, like the ones shown above, in which models hold posters that conceal their faces and reveal HIV facts. The models are all locals—some living with HIV, others not—who reflect the campaign’s target audience: people of color, notably heterosexual women, as well as men who have sex with men (MSM). Images have appeared in online testing ads, on UncoverHIV.org, on fliers and posters and, most prominently, on a billboard in Lexington.

The campaign has been received “extremely well,” says Pablo Archila, an HIV prevention specialist at AVOL (AIDS Volunteers Inc.), a local AIDS organization that launched the project with the help of nonprofit Bluegrass Black Pride and the HIV/AIDS branch of the Kentucky Department of Health.

“We’re sparking interest,” Archila tells POZ. “Since the campaign came out, we’ve been using those images and text in social media, and we’ve been getting so many more emails from people wanting information about testing and HIV.”

Many Kentuckians are at unusually high risk for the virus. Remember that HIV and hepatitis C outbreak in rural Indiana two years ago—the one linked to injection drug use? Last year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released a list of 220 counties most vulnerable to a similar outbreak. It turns out that eight of the top 10 counties are located in Kentucky; Wolfe County, about an hour from Lexington, occupies the No. 1 spot.



#uncover HIVCourtesy of Avol/Brett Barnett

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