



R.I.P. ACT UP Chicago Cofounder and HIV, LGBTQ Activist Lori Cannon

Lori Cannon helped lead Chicago's response to the HIV crisis. She was active in ACT UP, food pantries, the AIDS Memorial Quilt and more.

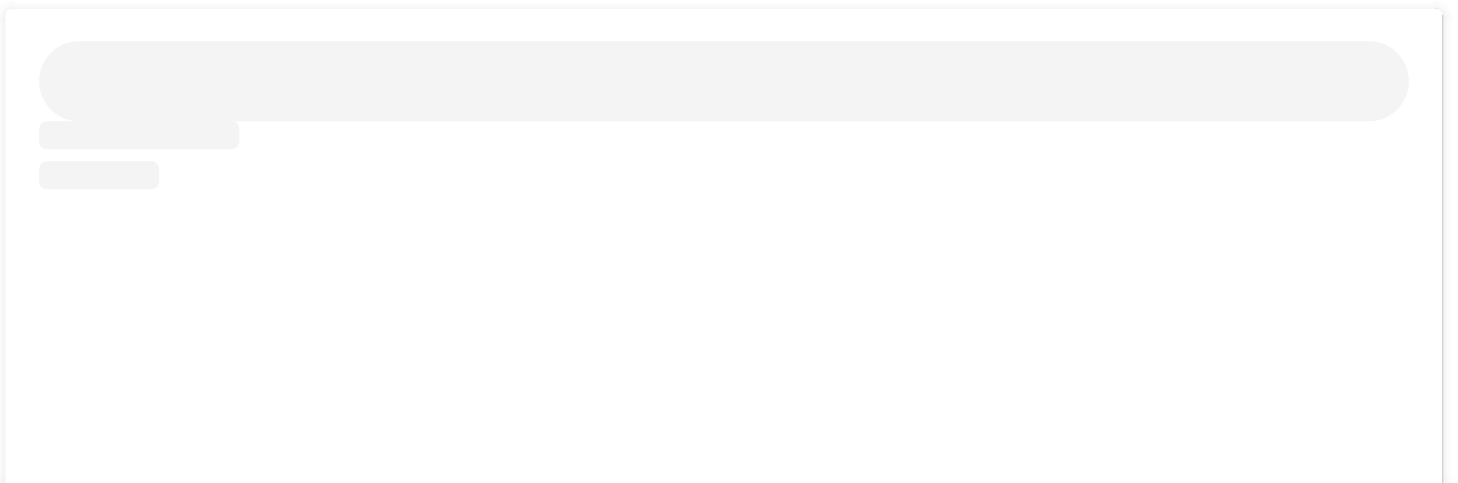
August 11, 2025 By Laura Schmidt

Lori Cannon, a longtime [HIV](#) and [AIDS](#) activist known for her decades of service to Chicago's LGBTQ community, has died at age 74, the [Windy City Times reports](#).

Throughout her life, Cannon founded and led several organizations dedicated to serving and uplifting the LGBTQ community and people living with HIV and AIDS. Cannon was a driving force behind [Chicago's](#) response to the HIV and AIDS crisis during the height of the epidemic in the 1980s.

In 1994, Cannon was [inducted into the Chicago LGBT Hall of Fame](#) as a "Friend of the Community."

"During the early dark days of HIV, when there were no resources for people—it was the Reagan years—the government was turning its back on people," said Greg Harris, former majority leader of the Illinois House, [in a news segment on WBEZ Chicago](#) honoring Cannon. "Lori was one of the people who stepped up and provided every kind of care you could imagine—mostly love, support and kindness. Over the last 40 years, she has done that every day."



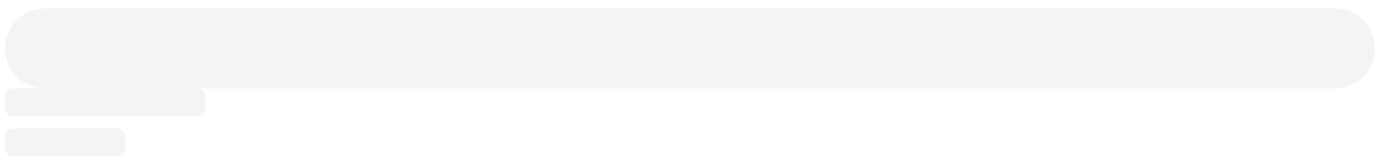


[View this post on Instagram](#)

A post shared by Center on Halsted (@center_on_halsted)

Cannon was first drawn to Chicago's organized LGBTQ community while working as a chauffeur for entertainers.

Her driving background inspired her to cofound Open Hand Chicago in 1988, the city's only meals-on-wheels program for low-income people with HIV and AIDS. Open Hand Chicago then went on to open Groceryland, a food pantry for people living with HIV and AIDS that continues to operate today despite [almost being shut down](#) earlier this year.





[View this post on Instagram](#)

A post shared by Alderwoman Leni Manaa-Hoppenworth (@the48thward)

In 1988, Cannon also cofounded ACT UP Chicago with her close friend and political cartoonist Danny Sotomayor and activist Paul Adams. At the time, ACT UP Chicago demanded a multifaceted approach to fighting AIDS, challenged price gouging by drug manufacturers, protested violence against people with AIDS and more.

“It’s hard to imagine Chicago without her, and it’s hard to imagine this community without her,” Owen Keehnen, an LGBTQ historian and a close friend of Cannon’s, told Windy City Times. “I am just one of the many, many people who find it hard to imagine the future without Lori around and in our lives.”

Cannon was also among the earliest volunteers for Chicago House, a nonprofit supporting people and families impacted by HIV since 1985 with housing, health and employment services. In 1988, 1990 and 1994, Cannon was on the steering committee for the NAMES Project —AIDS Memorial Quilt, where she coordinated media and public relations activities.

In a [social media post](#), entertainer Angelique Munro honored “Mama Lori” and detailed her many accomplishments as an advocate, volunteer and friend. Munro noted that Cannon volunteered at several organizations, including AIDS Legal Counsel of Chicago, STOP AIDS Chicago, Howard Brown Health and the AIDS care unit at Advocate Illinois Masonic Medical Center.

“Mama Lori was the lifeline for so many of us. Her kitchen was open. Her arms were open. Her heart—endlessly open,” Munro wrote. “To Lori—and every volunteer who’s ever packed a grocery bag, delivered a meal or sat bedside with someone in need—thank you. Your love and devotion built this community. Nothing can take that legacy away.”