



R.I.P. Iris Long, a Lifesaving HIV Treatment Activist and Ally

A retired pharmaceutical chemist in the early days of AIDS, Iris Long shared vital knowledge with fellow activists in ACT UP New York.

April 10, 2026 By [Trent Straube](#)

Iris Long, who helped steer early [AIDS advocates](#) into effective treatment activism that led to the development of lifesaving HIV meds, died April 4. She was 92.

Long was a retired pharmaceutical chemist living in Queens, New York, when AIDS emerged as a global threat in the 1980s. Compelled to take action at a time when people couldn't do research online and when most young AIDS activists knew little about pharmaceutical companies and drug development, Long shared her knowledge with activists in [ACT UP](#) New York, working directly with them on effective ways to pressure researchers to test and market lifesaving drugs. The title of a CBS news segment in 2013 illustrates her legacy: "[Iris Long: How One Woman Saved Eight Million People](#)."

That segment featured journalist and [filmmaker David France](#), whose documentary [How to Survive a Plague](#), which spotlighted Long, had just been released. The documentary also highlighted activist Peter Staley.

In a Facebook post this week, Staley wrote:

I just heard that Iris Long has died. She was a scientist, older than the rest of us, and straight, but felt a calling to join ACT UP during its earliest days. She offered to teach the young gay men and women who wanted to tackle our number one priority—how to push the system to find treatments that would save us and our loved ones from dying. Without Iris, there would have been no Treatment & Data Committee—the birth of expert activists—a model that other movements now try to emulate. RIP, Iris. Sending so much appreciation to her husband, Mark.

[POZ profiled Long](#) in our July-August 2013 issue, which showcased HIV-negative allies. Here's part of that article:

When Iris Long first learned about AIDS, the disease was so new, it didn't have a name. The topic came up during a lecture on skin diseases while she was engaged as a postdoctoral

fellow in the department of immunology at Stony Brook University in New York. In the late 1980s, after reading reports about AIDS and going to local New York City AIDS meetings, Long worked the hotline at Gay Men's Health Crisis. Soon, she joined ACT UP (the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) and introduced the notion of treatment activism to the grassroots movement.

As a retired pharmaceutical chemist, Long, who is HIV negative, was able to provide the activists and AIDS community with much-needed information about clinical trials and potential treatment drugs. Her work with ACT UP was recently featured in the Oscar-nominated film *How to Survive a Plague*. Says Long of her contribution: "I wanted to help people who were infected—and those who weren't—learn more about AIDS. At that time, there was a great need for information by the gay community."

That information saved the lives of millions of people living with HIV. We offer our eternal gratitude