The Denver Principles at 40

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August 14, 2023 By Joe Mejía

“We are ‘People With AIDS’ [PWAs],’’ boldly declared the preamble to The Denver Principles in 1983, a time when the word AIDS was often whispered in fear and the vilification of PWAs was at its peak.

The Denver Principles were first articulated by a group of gay men with AIDS at the Fifth Annual Gay and Lesbian Health Conference in Denver in 1983. The bill of rights condemned the use of the term “victims” in reference to PWAs, asserted that PWAs had the right to quality medical treatment and to have medical procedures explained to them and called for PWAs to form caucuses to set their own agenda. As such, the principles were a blueprint not only for the HIV activism of subsequent years, which led to effective treatments for the virus, but also for the self-advocacy espoused by anyone fighting an illness today. (See “AIDS Activists Pass the Baton” to learn more.) In June, the principles were duly honored for their role in changing health care for all at 40th anniversay events at the Dupont Circle Hotel in Washington, DC, and the Curtis Hotel in Denver.



Rep. Barbara Lee (D–Calif.) (center) received an award at an anniversary event in DC. Lee was recognized for her efforts to fight HIV, including her cosponsorship of the REPEAL HIV Discrimination Act of 2022.Representative Barbara Lee/Twitter

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