



# Why This University President Publicly Disclosed His HIV Status

Raymond E. Crossman has been living with HIV for three decades. This year, he decided to speak out—and fight again.

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Raymond E. Crossman has been the president of [Adler University](#) since 2003; founded in Chicago, the institution stresses social justice and activism. He's the cochair of LGBTQ Presidents in Higher Education. And he has been living with HIV for 30 years. Yet until very recently, he hadn't disclosed his status publicly. Why now?

The answer can be found in the headlines of an essay he published last week on Salon.com: "[It's 1985 all over again: To me, the Reagan years were a time of death—and Trump's era feels eerily similar.](#)"

Crossman grew up in 1980s New York City, the decade he suspects he contracted HIV. He became an AIDS activist during that time period, motivated by the leadership at GMHC and ACT UP. He writes:

I was certain—as were many gay men—that few cared if we all died, because we heard those words often and from many.... I believed then that dying from AIDS was simply part of being gay.

Today, I wonder whether many immigrants—and many people who might look like immigrants—feel now how I felt in the 1980s. I cannot know the contemporary experience of many marginalized groups, but I can imagine that many people...feel as abandoned by the state as I felt then.

The parallels between then and now are why I am disclosing my HIV status publicly.

But why did he wait until now to disclose, especially given that he has been openly gay and leads a university one would expect to be supportive? Crossman himself raises the question in his Salon essay and offers this:

My list of answers is long and psychologically revealing: fear of repercussions (many real, some imagined), a desire not to be pitied or summed up by my status, a need to focus on

others and to be useful, my own internalized heterosexism and homophobia, a need to remain private in a very public job.

Or, perhaps it's that I was waiting to use this asset of mine when it's most needed.

Students at my university—a university that is explicitly focused on social justice—ask me what to do right now. Black and brown students ask how to stand up to hate and violence. Queer students ask what it means that the Department of Education is led by someone who has supported discrimination and conversion therapy. Students ask how to translate their passions into actions that will matter. I realize they think I'm an elder who has answers, and I see they're more ready than I was in the 1980s. I realize too I have some answers that I've learned from the successes and failures of the 1980s—lessons about leadership, strategy and focus of advocacy and political action. I know how to fight for my life and an oppressed community and how to win.

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