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Update on Puerto Ricans Living With HIV Post-Hurricane

A San Juan AIDS clinic stocked up before the storm, but many residents can't access it, says the city's mayor.

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Seven weeks ago, on September 20, Hurricane Maria struck Puerto Rico. Today, nearly 68 percent of the island remains without electricity and 17 percent of residents lack safe drinking water, but San Juan Mayor Carmen Yulín Cruz tells The Washington Blade that her government is doing everything it can to help people there living with HIV/AIDS.

Officials in the island's capital stocked up on HIV meds before the storm made landfall, and an AIDS clinic in the city reopened two weeks later, though it's not operating at full capacity yet. The clinic also supplies food and water to its clients when they pick up their meds. However, many people with HIV outside the city are unable to get the meds and supplies because of the damaged infrastructure.

According to Wilfred Labiosa, cofounder of WAVES AHEAD, an organization that works with at-risk groups in Puerto Rico, who is referenced in part two of the Blade's interview with Cruz, some transgender Puerto Ricans have left the island in order to obtain hormone treatment. In fact, she said, the hurricane has disproportionately affected the island's LGBT population. One bit of good news is that the storm didn't damage Puerto Rico's first LGBT monument, a tribute to the 49 people killed by a gunman at Florida's Pulse nightclub, a popular venue for gay Latinos.

Cruz told the Blade that the government is working with U.S.-based AIDS Healthcare Foundation to supply generators to those living with HIV who need power.

As POZ reported in our October cover story about Puerto Rico–which went to press before the storm hit—about 19,000 people on the island are living with HIV. Read that article here and its follow-up here plus more at #Puerto Rico.

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