



Whenever I Call You Friend

This special issue focuses on African Americans and highlights contributions of other Black advocates.

January 6, 2025 By [Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.](#)

I fully embrace being called a long-term survivor and calling myself one. That wasn't always true. For the longest time, I refused to adopt the phrase. After three decades of living with HIV, I have finally given myself permission to do so.

I tested HIV positive in 1992; I was 22 years old. I thought I would be dead by 30, so it took me many years to get my head above water enough to actually appreciate what surviving meant. Nonetheless, the phrase "long-term survivor" held a particular status that I associated with those who were living with HIV since the early days.

I wasn't alone in that thinking. I'm sure that some folks still think that way. We're all entitled to our opinions. That said, as people with HIV get older, more of them will be living with the virus for decades. If they're not long-term survivors, then what should they be called?

To complicate matters, a new wrinkle to this conversation has emerged in the past few years. There are people who experienced the trauma of the early epidemic but remained HIV negative. Some long-term survivors are encouraging them to also identify as long-term survivors. Victoria Noe, one of these allies, has some thoughts on the subject. [Go here](#) for more.

Another group in the HIV community that doesn't often get discussed is straight men, especially straight Black men. They constitute a larger share of the community than many folks realize. Andy Feds, our cover subject, among other advocates such as Larry Bryant and Derrick Robinson, want to change the narrative about straight men with HIV. [Go here](#) to learn more.

This special issue focuses on African Americans and highlights contributions of other Black advocates, including Tom Fikiri Masarara and Joanna Robinson.

Masarara is an HIV activist originally from the Republic of Burundi who now resides in South Africa with his wife and three children. He fled violence, seeking refuge in many countries before starting a new life in South Africa, where he tested HIV positive in 2002. [Go here](#) to read about his advocacy.

Robinson is a longtime HIV advocate in Miami. As a transgender Black woman living with the virus, she knows firsthand what it's like to live on the margins. She now uses that experience to help others with HIV, including people newly diagnosed with the virus. [Go here](#) to read more about her contributions.

As we were closing this print issue of POZ, we learned about the passing of Cornelius Baker. He died unexpectedly of natural causes. He was a beloved HIV policy expert and a longtime activist for gay Black men. His career spanned decades working for federal and national organizations. He was also a member of the POZ Advisory Board. [Go here](#) to read more about his legacy.

Many people with HIV occasionally experience anxiety or depression. However, if you're having persistent anxiety or depression, it may be time to seek assistance. Psychotherapy and medications can help. [Go here](#) for more.