For World AIDS Day 2025, the Federal Government Stayed Quiet, but the HIV Community Made Some Noise

While the Trump administration refused to recognize World AIDS Day, advocates filled the void with remembrance, resistance and visibility.

December 8, 2025 By Joe Mejía

For the first time since 1988, the U.S. government did not observe World AIDS Day this year. Noted each December 1, the day of observance is intended to honor the millions of people lost to the disease, acknowledge progress made in the fight against HIV and AIDS and raise awareness among the general public that the epidemic persists. In November, under the direction of President Trump, the State Department instructed employees and grantees to “refrain from publicly promoting World AIDS Day through any communication channels, media engagements, speeches or other public-facing messaging,” according to an email obtained by the New York Times.

Longtime HIV activist Peter Staley, a cofounder of PrEP4All, which seeks to expand access to pre-exposure prophylaxis for HIV prevention, called the move “petty and hostile,” adding, “It just felt very reminiscent of the Reagan administration,” referring to the former president’s catastrophic neglect of AIDS in the 1980s during the peak era of the epidemic.

Undeterred, the HIV community marked the day with messages of protest against the newly announced Trump policy, along with more traditional remembrances, like candlelight vigils, the unveiling of new AIDS memorials and more, all of it documented and shared via posts on social media, like those below. Fittingly, the World AIDS Day theme this year was "Overcoming disruption, transforming the AIDS response."

Longtime HIV advocate Madonna shared some stern words regarding the Trump administration’s decision not to promote World AIDS Day. (The superstar HIV advocate graced our March 2024 cover; the same year, readers voted Madonna the Best Celebrity Advocate.)

In Washington, DC, Housing Works demonstrated alongside AIDS United, NMAC and Health GAP to confront deadly political obstruction and highlight the number of lives that will be lost around the world due to the lack of funding for HIV and AIDS.

ABC7 LA correspondent Karl Schmid, who is living with HIV, proudly stood beside former Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi at the World AIDS Day event Light in the Grove at the National AIDS Memorial Grove in San Francisco.

Advocate Race Bannon, who is living with HIV, was awarded the National AIDS Memorial's Lifetime of Commitment Award this year for his four decades of work to promote sexual health awareness and destigmatize HIV.

Sister Roma of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence emceed the Light in the Grove.

The Palm Springs AIDS Memorial sculpture The Well of Love by Phillip K. Smith III, broke ground on World AIDS Day, revealing a scale model of the memorial in progress.

A digital rendering shows the memorial's scale.

Palm Springs City Council Member Jeffrey Bernstein addressed attendees at the memorial's groundbreaking.

Demetre Daskalakis, MD, a former Centers for Disease Control and Prevention official who resigned in protest when CDC director Susan Monarez was ousted by the Trump administration, shared a defiant message.

View this post on Instagram

A post shared by Demetre Daskalakis (@drdemetre)

At the New York City AIDS Memorial World AIDS Day event, which included the reading of the names of those lost to AIDS, Eric Sawyer, a cofounder of Health GAP, ACT UP New York and Housing Works, who is HIV positive, shared what keeps him acting up more than 40 years after he acquired the virus.

Over 100 volunteer readers recited names for six straight hours to honor those lost.

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A post shared by NYC AIDS Memorial (@nycaidsmemorial)

“We honor, we mourn, we fight….” Reginald Thomas Brown, who has been living with HIV since 1986 led attendees at the NYC AIDS Memorial in a chant, insisting, “We will not be erased.”

For its first World AIDS Day ceremony, the recently unveiled STORIES: The AIDS Monument in Los Angeles hosted an event where community members gathered to remember, mourn, renew their activism and hear moving stories from the community.

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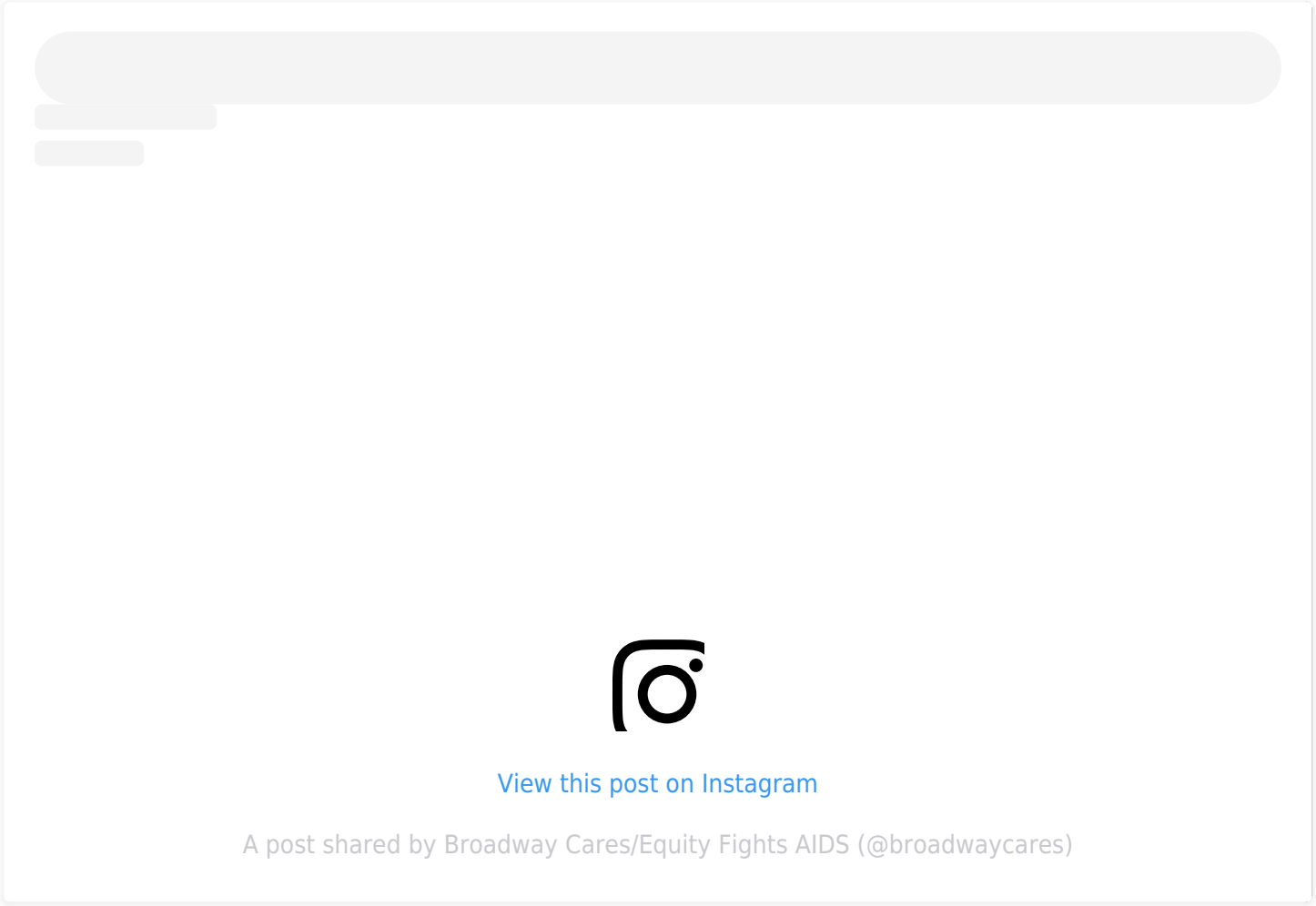
A post shared by STORIES: The AIDS Monument (@theaidsmonument)

Longtime HIV advocate Rosie Perez, who volunteered at God’s Love We Deliver, which has delivered meals to people living with HIV for 40 years, shared what World AIDS Day means to her.

View this post on Instagram

A post shared by God’s Love We Deliver (@godslovenyc)

Actor and activist Javier Muñoz, who is living with HIV, observed a moment of silence on behalf of Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS to honor the lives lost to AIDS-related causes.



Even beyond World AIDS Day, the HIV community continued to draw attention to proposed Congressional cuts to federal HIV programs. On December 4, the Save HIV Funding Campaign visited the Nasdaq MarketSite in Times Square where Jeremiah Johnson, cofounder of the Save HIV Funding Campaign and executive director of PrEP4All, rang the opening bell.

View this post on Instagram

A post shared by AVAC (@hivpxresearch)

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