



Yo Soy La Voz

This issue highlighting Latinos spotlights HIV advocates who are working to improve the lives of those living with or at risk for the virus.

September 23, 2024 By [Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.](#)

I grew up listening to Celia Cruz. As a first-generation Cuban American, I regarded her music to be synonymous with my heritage. Singers such as Dolly Parton and Madonna have similar symbolism for other communities.

Celia's career spanned decades. She began performing in 1950s Cuba, became the Queen of Salsa in the 1970s while living in exile in the United States and embraced reggaeton-inspired music in her later years until her death in 2003. Her catchphrase ¡Azúcar! (Sugar!) is forever evocative of salsa music worldwide.

So I'm thrilled that Celia will be featured on the 2024 U.S. quarter. She is the first Afro-Latina to have this honor. It may not seem like such a big deal, but please take my word for it that it is. These days, when Latinos, especially Latino immigrants, are facing such tough times in the United States, it matters to feel like you are seen and heard.

So many songs in Celia's catalog stand out, but for me, one in particular always gives me the feels. "Yo Soy La Voz" ("I Am the Voice") is a deep cut from a 1969 album titled Quimbo Quimbumbia, which also features Tito Puente, the King of the Timbales (a type of drums).

It's a love song to Cuba, in which she shares her desire to return some day. That emotion is common to all Cubans who were exiled. Even though I was born in New York City, I understand that longing for home and the tragedy of never achieving that goal. May those undergoing similar hardships have better outcomes and brighter futures.

In that spirit, this special issue highlighting Latinos spotlights HIV advocates who are working to improve the lives of those living with or at risk for the virus.

Francisco Ruiz, our cover subject, is a fine example. The longtime HIV advocate was doing the work well before he became HIV positive himself. He's now the first Latino director of the White House Office of National AIDS Policy (ONAP). Please [go here](#) to learn more about his new role.

Axel Torres Marrero is another great example. As the senior director of policy, prevention and harm reduction at Hyacinth, the largest AIDS service organization in New Jersey, he has had far-reaching influence on HIV-related law in the state. [Go here](#) for more.

As ONAP director, Francisco sits at the intersection of HIV-related efforts across the federal government. Earlier this year, he met with federal agencies engaged in implementing the National HIV/AIDS Strategy. [Go here](#) to learn about their progress.

Not all Latinos speak or read Spanish, but having HIV information available in Spanish will always be an important part of the fight against the virus among Latinos.

In support of that vision, please find the [2024 edition of POZ en Español](#) bound in the center of this print issue of POZ. HIV advocate David Ernesto Munar is [the cover subject](#). He shares the lessons he's learned in his 30-year journey of living with the virus. Please also [go here](#) for the 2024 HIV drug chart in Spanish.