40 Years of HIV

People aren't dying from HIV in the same numbers, but there are still widespread disparities.

June 1, 2021 By Paul Kawata

This week there will be lots of stories about the 40th anniversary of the first reported cases of a disease that would later be known as AIDS. Back then, this milestone was unthinkable. All we wanted to do was get through the next week without someone dying. To mark this important anniversary, NMAC invited four longtime activists to talk about the impact that report had on their lives. Over the month of June, we will release those conversations in our social media and via our weekly newsletters.

While people aren't dying from HIV in the same numbers and new cases have dropped by 9% from 2015 to 2019, there are still widespread disparities. African Americans are eight times more likely to get HIV when compared to White America. Latinx are four times more likely. NMAC is still fighting for all the communities hardest hit by HIV. We are still committed to addressing the racial disparities that has plagued HIV for too long. Does the Harvard Law Review hold the key for including race as a component of HIV funding? A May 31st article in the New York Times noted:

"The Harvard Law Review, for instance, selects 30 of its 48 editors based on some combination of a writing competition and grades. Another 18 editors, a statement on its website says, are "selected through a holistic but anonymous review" that may consider "racial or ethnic identity, disability status, gender identity, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status."

The question of whether this diversity produces a better result was answered by a study that looked at 13,000 research articles. It found the "median citations of the Harvard Law Review increased by 23% in the five years after the adoption of diversity programs." According to the authors of the study, this is statistically significant.

Can the same rules be applied to federal HIV funds? While most of the awards are given out on a competitive basis, there is a certain number of awards that are holistically and anonymously reviewed that may consider racial or ethnic identity, disability status, gender identity, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status.

There is a racial reckoning coming to America after the death of George Floyd and protests from Black Lives Matter. Critical race theory is at the center of the culture wars and neither side will give up without a fight. The fight for racial justice is a fight for the soul of America. Who do we want to be as a country?

I believe the Biden-Harris administration is looking for strategies to fight racism by prioritizing racial equity across government programs. They understand there is a problem, but like most of us get lost trying to figure out solutions. Taken as a whole, the problem is overwhelming. How do you end racism in America? And it doesn't stop at racism. Justice for people of color can lead to equity for the transgender community, women's community, and LGBTQ community. That is why the Harvard Law Review is such an interesting example.

It's hard to believe that the world has now been living with HIV for four decades. Time has moved much too quickly, and I am now an old man. I just want to live long enough to be here for the end of HIV and to see America on the right side of the fight for justice and equity.

Yours in the struggle,

Paul Kawata

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