



When the Government Doesn't Care: HIV, Medicaid, and the LGBTQ+ Community

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Here we are again.

During the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and 1990s, when the fear of HIV and people like me who were living with the virus was rampant, we had to live through a government that didn't care about us. The first cases were reported in 1981, and the illustrious, the great B-movie star President Ronald Reagan was uncharacteristically silent. He was called "The Great Communicator", yet he couldn't even choke out the words "HIV" or "AIDS," or even eek out a mention of the people it was killing until 1985. He didn't publicly address the situation until 1987. By then over 3,500 people in the United States had died of AIDS.

Because the virus initially attacked gay men and people who used intravenous drugs, the common thought was that although the disease was deadly and spreading quickly, it was 'killing all the right people.' All throughout history, LGBTQI+ people have been considered expendable, and the AIDS crisis was no exception.

So what happened? Members of our community stepped up. (Shout out to lesbians—thank you.) We took care of each other. We held our sick friends' hands, we cooked meals, we cried and prayed together. And we mourned the loved ones we lost. We also became experts in medical systems, hospitals, pharmaceutical companies. We learned and fought for our rights as human beings. And we laughed and danced to keep our spirits up, and we had glorious sex (condoms prolong the pleasure!) as if to say F-you to AIDS. We did all that for each other, because we had to.

Another thing our community did was kick ass. We protested and fought and, you know, made a marvelous fuss (as only gays can), demanding that our public leaders not only address the crisis and the growing numbers that were being affected by the virus, but actually take action. The results were that the government was forced to see us, and see people living with HIV as human beings. Money was allotted, research was funded, and in 1996, the first successful antiretroviral medications came out, allowing people with HIV to live long, healthy lives. (Of course, it was more complicated than it sounds here, but you can read the history for yourself.)

Now, as millions upon millions of United States citizens are being stripped of their health

insurance, we are again under the rule of a government that doesn't really care about us. Fuck you, Trump! And all your MAGA lackeys!

We are at the dawn of another potential AIDS crisis in our country. (And thanks to Trump's defunding of PEPFAR, the world.) Approximately 1.2 million Americans are living with HIV, and 40% of us rely on Medicaid for their healthcare. The medications that keep people like me living with HIV healthy and with a viral load that makes it impossible to transmit the virus, are very expensive. According to WebMD, the medical costs for a person living with HIV in the US, including medications and medical provider visits, can range from \$1,800 to \$4,500 per month. Insurance, be it private, from an employer, Obamacare, Medicare or Medicaid, obviously defray those costs.

But not any more.

The possibility exists that the 40% of people living with HIV, that's 480,000 Americans, if they lose Medicaid and have no other options, will not have access to medical treatment or HIV drugs. Without treatment, the risk of spreading the virus is great. Moreover, people living with HIV without medications get sick. People living with HIV without medications die. And that would be just the beginning.

So here we are again, having to suit up to fight for access to life-saving medications and care. To fight for our community. To fight to live.

But take heart, there is hope. The thing that gives me the most hope right now is us: the LGBTQI+ community. Already, activists and advocates are stepping up. This time, it's not just a fight about HIV. It's a fight for the transgender community. For everyone. We have to join up with other communities, the women's community, the pro-choice community, with Black Lives Matter. Let's expand the pie of people who are moved by the bad things that are happening, and are outraged. We can all be outraged together.

It's going to take a lot of hard work, and we've proven before that we are mighty. Things seem extremely bleak, but I am an optimistic person. I want you to find some optimism too. There's not sitting on the sidelines. If hope seems impossible to conjure up, you can borrow mine.