



# Leading U.S. advocate to develop strategy and interventions to ensure U=U is foundational in ending the HIV epidemic

Mariah Wilberg joins the Prevention Access Campaign to build Undetectable Equals Untransmittable (U=U) programs in the U.S.

January 6, 2022 By [Undetectable = Untransmittable](#)

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Dear friends and colleagues,

All of us at Prevention Access Campaign (PAC) are excited to announce that Mariah Wilberg will join PAC as Senior Director, U.S. Strategy and Ending the Epidemic on January 24th. As a member of the PAC U.S. leadership team, Mariah will help develop overall strategy for U.S. programs, advocacy, technical assistance, and communications. Mariah will also develop and implement an ending the epidemic program to disseminate resources and best practices and provide consultation and technical assistance to public health agencies. She is excited to partner with local, state, and federal health departments as they integrate U=U into ending the HIV epidemic plans.

“We are beyond thrilled that Mariah is officially joining the PAC team,” said Murray Penner, PAC’s U.S. Executive Director. “U=U is the foundation for ending the HIV epidemic. Mariah’s deeply personal understanding and lived experiences of HIV and U=U, coupled with her extensive work implementing and communicating U=U in public health programs, will help PAC ensure that U=U becomes central to our collective work to end the HIV epidemic,” Penner continued. “We are excited to match Mariah’s passion, energy, and determination with PAC’s mission to redefine what it means to live and love fearlessly with HIV.”

Mariah brings years of lived and professional experience to her role. She ran away from home at age 17 while struggling with an undiagnosed mental illness. She quickly became homeless and turned to sex work to survive. Stuck in survival mode, she experienced physical and sexual abuse, an HIV diagnosis at 19, feelings of shame and worthlessness, and escalating substance use. Eventually, she was incarcerated for drug sales at age 25. In prison, she received an AIDS diagnosis. Determined to live and to heal, Mariah sought the tools and help she needed to change her life. She started taking her HIV medications, came out of the closet with her status, and left

prison determined to make a difference in the systems that failed her.

First, Mariah became a volunteer HIV educator at the Minnesota AIDS Project (now Rainbow Health). There, she discovered a passion and talent for communicating complex information to diverse audiences in a way that they could easily understand. Volunteering led to a paid position, and Mariah was the most requested speaker during her time with the agency. Her next role was providing HIV education, testing, and social media and traditional outreach to youth and young adults who were experiencing homelessness or unstable housing. After that, Mariah provided HIV education, testing, and outreach for the Rural AIDS Action Network. She also managed the agency's social media presence and provided coverage at the syringe service program.

Next, Mariah joined the Minnesota Department of Health as a communications specialist focusing on STIs and HIV. There, she led Minnesota to become the third U.S. state to endorse U=U. She then spearheaded a statewide U=U education and awareness initiative, which included a transit campaign that generated millions of views. At the request of NASTAD, Mariah provided U=U technical assistance to other states, highlighted Minnesota's U=U implementation during a NASTAD webinar, and was a plenary panel speaker at the 2019 NASTAD conference. Mariah also co-led a 10-state U=U survey of infectious disease providers. The results were presented at the 2019 United States Conference on HIV/AIDS and covered by Medscape, and the survey tool has since been requested by CDC Vietnam and health departments across the country.

Since 2019, Mariah has been leading the implementation of Minnesota's ending the epidemic plan: END HIV MN. During her time there, she collaborated with diverse stakeholders on statewide initiatives to address HIV-related health disparities, remove barriers to HIV care and service utilization, and increase meaningful involvement of impacted people and communities. Mariah is also involved in local HIV and criminal justice reform efforts as a volunteer, including sitting on county and state advisory boards and motivational speaking in correctional facilities.

At the State, Mariah used her strong relationships in the HIV community to bridge the gap between public health officials, HIV service providers, and people affected by HIV. She is passionate about ensuring that directly impacted people are involved in the policy, budget, and decision-making that affects their lives. She approaches her work through an equity lens, and is especially interested in the intersections between HIV and justice system involvement, drug use, sex work, and mental illness.

An accomplished public speaker, Mariah has spoken about HIV and U=U locally and nationally, including during the 2019 United States Conference on HIV/AIDS U=U plenary. Mariah is an ongoing freelance writer for NAM aidsmap and her award-winning writing about HIV and U=U has also been featured in HIV Specialist Magazine, Apolitical, and TheBody.com. Mariah has also provided training and consulting, including grant writing, communications, and health education, for local and national clients.

Mariah received the Minnesota Department of Health Star Honors Award for Positive Impact, was named an inaugural 40 under 40 in Public Health by the de Beaumont Foundation, and has been

featured by local and national media for her U=U work in Minnesota. She was also named the Graduate Outstanding Student Award recipient and was the commencement speaker when she graduated summa cum laude with a Master of Public Administration from Metropolitan State University in 2019.

“All of us at PAC are very excited to have Mariah join our team. We will all benefit from Mariah’s outstanding leadership and passion. I admire her transparency and openness to share her journey,” said Davina Conner, PAC’s U.S. Creative Engagements Outreach Specialist. “Since 2016 Mariah has been speaking loudly about U=U and shares the same commitment and love for the campaign as all of us at PAC do. She is an amazing advocate who works to integrate U=U into public health policy, interventions, and programs. Please join us in welcoming our sister in advocacy, Mariah, to the PAC team.”

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