



# Mississippi's Ending the HIV Epidemic Efforts Emphasize Innovative Approaches to Reach Rural Communities

Participants discussed efforts to address health care deserts, HIV criminalization laws and housing insecurity.

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Mississippi is one of seven states with a substantial number of HIV diagnoses in rural areas, making it a priority jurisdiction in the [Ending the HIV Epidemic in the U.S. \(EHE\)](#) initiative. The state health department's approach aligns with national strategies and tailors the response to meet the needs of residents.

During a recent visit to Jackson, staff from the Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH) briefed Captain John Oguntomilade, BDS, MPH, PhD, EHE Initiative Coordination Lead for the HHS Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health, about state EHE efforts.

During the community engagement session, participants discussed the need to continue efforts to address health care deserts, HIV criminalization laws, and mitigate housing insecurity. Other discussion topics included working more with people who have lived experience and expanding the syndemic and holistic approach to mitigate health disparities.

Captain Oguntomilade commended the MSDH EHE team for their strategic partnerships and innovative activities to improve access and uptake of services in rural areas. They also held a community engagement session and visited the following health centers and providers involved in implementing the EHE initiative locally:

- [Jackson-Hinds Comprehensive Health Center](#): Clinicians provide up to 300 rapid HIV tests per week and offer mobile services to reach more community members. Due to the intentional outreach and awareness campaigns to women, they have enrolled more women on PrEP than men.
- [University of Mississippi Medical Center](#): Emergency Department (ED) physician James

Galbraith, MD, implemented HIV testing in the ED to increase knowledge of status, particularly among people who may only been seen by a health care provider when they visit an ED.

- [Community Health Center Association of Mississippi](#): The organization is creating a sub-specialization of Community Health Workers focused on HIV, STI, hypertension, motivational interviewing, and cultural competencies.
- [Northtown Pharmacy](#): The only Black-owned independent pharmacy within a 100-mile radius of Jackson, a majority Black city, serves clients in Jackson and surrounding areas. Owner Andrew Clark, Pharm D, and staff provide culturally appropriate services and are working to increase community outreach to link more people to care.

### Community Shares Feedback on EHE in Mississippi

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Upon concluding the visit, Ms. Jennifer Fulcher LSW, MS, MSDH Director for Communicable Diseases, said: “It was great to meet you and receive feedback from your time in Mississippi. We look forward to expanding opportunities in our state. The information I gleaned from your visit was invaluable. Thank you again for taking the time to visit with us and our stakeholders.”

Other members of the MSDH team participating in the visit included Kendra Johnson, MPH, Director, STD/HIV Office; Rita Momah, DrPH, MPH, Ryan White Part B EHE Coordinator; Kathryn Taylor, MD, Interim State Epidemiologist; Casondra Neal, Special Projects Officer; Tamika Smith, Public Health Environmental Officer; Dakota Dale, Finance and Operations Leader; Anita Myla, PhD, MPH, Epidemiologist; and Snow Wang, MPH.

### About the EHE Initiative

The EHE initiative, a leading component of the work by HHS to implement the National HIV/AIDS Strategy, aims to reduce new HIV infections in the United States by 90% by 2030. The HHS Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health coordinates EHE across HHS agencies and offices. Focusing additional resources in the 57 jurisdictions where they are needed most—including Mississippi—the EHE initiative has scaled up four science-based [strategies](#) focusing on ending the epidemic: diagnose, treat, prevent, and respond.

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