



Safeguarding Health Is a Collective Effort

Executive director of PrEP4All and co-founder of Save HIV Funding, Jeremiah Johnson shares his vision of how diverse advocacy efforts around HIV prevention, care, and research can all work together.

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Jeremiah Johnson, MPH, didn't know he'd grow up to be an advocate. But there was perhaps an early aspiration to transform his passion to help others into meaningful social change.

"When I was five or six years old, I gave my speech in the living room to my mom and sister [as] if I were being inaugurated as president," he related, both amused and embarrassed about the memory.

Later, at the University of Colorado in Boulder, he studied political science and international affairs, but "it wasn't until my own HIV diagnosis though that I knew where to take that energy and point it."

In 2008, he learned of his diagnosis while serving in Ukraine in the Peace Corps. Following policy, the Peace Corps terminated him because of his HIV-positive status. He fought the dismissal with the help of the ACLU and got the policy overturned, all the while navigating the early days of living with HIV by seeking (and finding) emotional and medical support.

Leading with love, he has since pivoted from his own struggles into advocacy for communities in need.

In 2022, Johnson became executive director of [PrEP4All](#), an organization dedicated to putting lifesaving medication into the hands of everyone who needs it. Its policy advocacy includes a focus on expanding access to PrEP, an HIV prevention medication, through educating health providers about the option, raising awareness among groups that have been disproportionately impacted by HIV, and creating a national program that tackles barriers to access, particularly for the uninsured and underinsured and those impacted by racial and gender disparities.

"Advancing access to critical and innovative science is really an honor and a privilege and something I'm grateful for every day," he said.

As co-founder of the [Save HIV Funding](#) campaign, Johnson recently rang the bell at the New York

Stock Exchange—an unusual tactic, he admitted, but one that focused “millions of eyeballs” on \$2 billion in proposed Congressional cuts to federal HIV programs.

Johnson applauds creativity in advocacy and thinks it’s wise to invest in the “dreamers and doers” who manage to break through with crucial messaging in today’s “very intense political and media environment.”

Johnson also thinks we should foreground a holistic understanding of what he calls the “ecosystem” of the HIV movement, one that addresses a diverse range of issues, starting points, and needs.

It takes a collective effort—street-based advocates and policy advocates who work at all levels of government, as well as advocates who work on different aspects, such as prevention, housing, service delivery, research, and funding for vaccines and a cure, he noted.

“A critical portion of that ecosystem are the funders that go out there and ensure that we find a way to take wealth in our societies...and make sure that that is channeled back through philanthropic means to fund a full and robust movement.”

Part of the key to supporting the ecosystem are foundational organizations such as amfAR, which provides grants to innovative researchers and, at times, community-based organizations like PrEP4All. Over the years, “amfAR has been able to step in at critical moments for our survival and our sustainability with some funds that allowed us to get where we needed to go. That makes all the difference in the world.”

Asked about where the movement should be in five years, Johnson believes we need to commit for the long-term. “The call has been for us to end HIV as an epidemic by 2030...Domestically, globally, we have the tools—the complexity of getting [health interventions] out there, that’s all man-made. People have pointed out to me before: If we can get Coca-Cola to literally every corner of the planet, with all the innovations we have in treatment and testing and prevention we [should be able to] get it out to people. We need that to still be our guiding light.”

He added: “Within five years, we could also see—through amazing research—even more available to us. But that will only happen if right now we fight against those who seek to erase us and we survive at a level that allows us to rebuild, even where we are experiencing losses in this moment.”

amfAR is a leading nonprofit dedicated to advancing scientific discovery and transforming global health with a primary and enduring commitment to ending the HIV/ AIDS epidemic. Serving as a catalyst for breakthrough science, amfAR supports innovative research in areas where viruses and the immune system play a defining role, including cancer, neurological conditions, autoimmune disorders, and other viral diseases. Through strategic investments, global research partnerships, and evidence-based policy leadership, amfAR helps accelerate discoveries that improve health and save lives. Since 1985, amfAR has raised more than \$950 million and awarded in excess of 3,900 grants to scientists worldwide. Learn more at www.amfar.org.

