



USCHA: A Note From Paul

September 12, 2024 By [Paul Kawata](#)

Thank you for the notes of concern and support as we work to bring this year's United States Conference on HIV/AIDS to the community amidst the challenges of Hurricane Francine in New Orleans. This year is my 35th anniversary as the Executive Director of NMAC and it never gets easier.

NMAC can't control the weather and sometimes we're forced to make difficult decisions with rapidly changing information. We are sorry to everyone who had to change their plans and completely understand if you decided to stay home. Honestly, I had second thoughts too. But I'm also grateful to everyone who will be here, and they are why we have decided to move forward.

NMAC knows USCHA is not just another conference. It has a long and storied history, and unforeseen circumstances are a part of our hosting experience. Over the years the gathering has morphed into a family reunion that brings the HIV movement together. I've been doing a version of this meeting since 1987 and the National Skills Building Conference. This conference has created a platform for so many leaders who have taken the stage to share messages of action and hope. I will forever remember Mrs. Coretta Scott King's address that has remained with so many of us in the room that day

As we have continued to grow USCHA as an expanding table for everyone impacted by HIV, there have also been challenges. In 2001, USCA was slated for 9/13/01. Even after all the airports closed, over five hundred people found their way to the meeting. We put together USCA on the fly and it was one of the most memorable meetings. What I remind myself and our team, especially in moments like these, is that USCHA is and will remain about the community and not about NMAC. Like oppressed people around the world, we need to find that safe place called home to be with our chosen family during the good, but especially the tough times. The HIV movement has created a large and diverse family, and USCHA is where we return to reenergize and move forward.

In the years of doing this, NMAC makes the best possible decisions based on data at hand. We care deeply about community and our decisions begin and end with prioritizing your safety and wellness. Over the last few days we have monitored the weather, had conversations with New Orleans' mayor's office, been briefed by the seasoned staff at the Hyatt Regency hotel, and heard from people in the city who advised our decision. We also received honest feedback from our Host Planning Committee that was an important balancing element. After hearing everyone, the choice was mine to make, and in the spirit of community that will be here, USCHA is moving forward as planned.

While we've understandably had multiple cancelations, most people are still arriving and attending throughout the week. There are still over one hundred workshops and institutes, as well as multiple off-agenda gatherings to gain and learn from.

As our team prepares to host and take care of you, and as registration opens this afternoon, I want to thank everyone who is already here and to those who are arriving later this week. To everyone who decided to stay home, we completely understand your decision and know we will meet at another time.

Today we move forward with USCHA because the community is my north star, and NMAC will always fight for you.

Yours in the struggle,

Paul Kawata

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