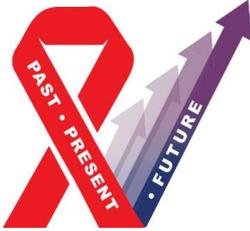




Department  
of Health

**Story of Ending the Epidemic: Past, Present, and Future**  
*2020 and Beyond: Access. Equity. Sustainability.*



# **2020 World AIDS Day and Ending the Epidemic Summit**

**Virtual Event: December 1-3**

## **Commissioner's Virtual Special Recognition Awards**

**December 1, 2020  
11:45 AM – 12:45 PM**

**Howard A. Zucker, MD, JD  
Commissioner of Health**

**Johanne E. Morne, MS  
Director, AIDS Institute**

**Karen Hagos, MPH  
Director, Office of Planning  
and Community Affairs  
AIDS Institute**

### *Adam Sadberry, Flutist*

*Adam has a diverse career as a flutist, educator, and voice in the classical music community. Adam is currently the acting principal flutist of the Memphis Symphony Orchestra, and his orchestral experiences include performances with the Albany Symphony Orchestra, Detroit Symphony Orchestra, New World Symphony, Omaha Symphony, and Sphinx Symphony Orchestra. Adam has performed and spoken on radio programs around the country including IPR, NPR, WRCJ, and WXXI, and in addition, Adam can be heard playing on the soundtrack of Disney's The Lion King (2019).*

### **Awardees**

#### **HIV**

**Krista Alfonso** is a Supervisor for Testing and Linkage at Trillium Health. Krista has worked in HIV testing, prevention and treatment since 2014. 2020 has brought significant challenges that made the fight to End the HIV Epidemic in New York State even more challenging for Trillium. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, in-person services were suspended, and the testing team forged ahead with innovation to ensure no community was left behind. Under Krista's leadership, Trillium Health designed and operationalized trillium@home. This service included no-cost concierge HIV/STI testing delivered to the patient's door and allowed the completion of sexual health assessments with same-day linkage to life-saving prevention medications, such as PrEP and PEP, via telemedicine.

**Linda Hakim** is currently the Director of Program Services at The Sharing Community. For 17 years, Linda has been a passionate and tireless advocate for individuals with and placed at risk for HIV. Linda oversees Westchester's Syringe Exchange Program and the pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) program. Linda serves on committees including the Ryan White Part A Tri-County Steering Committee and the New York State Department of Health AIDS Institute HIV Advisory Body. Linda selflessly makes herself available to clients 24/7 to ensure they have their medications and access to prevention services and supports to address issues related to social determinants of health.

**The Retention and Adherence Program (RAP) at the Institute for Family Health, or (RAP)Team**, embodies what it means to provide patient-centered, innovative, high quality care to New Yorkers living with HIV. The team championed efforts above and beyond their scope in recent years, including developing and implementing a Quick Start program for people newly diagnosed with HIV; conducting street outreach to engage young people in HIV prevention and pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP); and creating an integrated patient and staff committee to fight stigma. The team provides culturally competent care to a patient population that encompasses many marginalized groups, such as transgender women of color, young men who have sex with men who are newly diagnosed with HIV, and those struggling with substance use and/or mental illness.

**Sarahmona Przybyla, PhD, MPH**, is an Assistant Dean of Undergraduate Public Health Programs at the University of Buffalo, Department of Community Health and Behavior. Dr. Przybyla is an innovator in the field of HIV prevention research. Her contributions to scientific literature have led to advancements in pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) uptake and dissemination. Dr. Przybyla has spent the past decade working to create strong partnerships with local non-profit organizations, health departments, and county court systems to understand barriers to, and enhance engagement in, HIV care. Dr. Przybyla is a fierce advocate and inspires all who meet her. Dr. Przybyla has positioned herself on the forefront of public health to inform, educate, and empower others to be in control of their sexual health.

**Reverend Dr. Bruce Rivera** has been a social justice warrior in his beloved Bronx community for the past five decades. As the Pastor of Christ Church, UCC in the Bronx, Reverend Rivera is a vocal advocate for persons living with HIV. Despite ongoing criticism from his colleagues, Reverend Rivera continues to speak publicly from the pulpit about HIV. His message is focused on mitigating stigma and fear which continues to hurt vulnerable communities. Christ Church, UCC is welcoming and affirming to everyone, regardless of their status, gender identity or sexual orientation. Reverend Rivera has been an active participant in the AIDS Institute Faith Communities Project at the Bronx Regional Committee and, for the last 15 years, convened and facilitated an annual interfaith clergy conversation addressing HIV and domestic violence in faith communities.

## **LGBTQ**

**Devon Zappasodi** is currently the Suffolk Project Director for Pride for Youth (PFY) and has a strong history of identifying emerging needs of the LGBTQ+ community. Devon spearheaded many of the unique operational aspects of Long Island's first transgender medical center. In the role of Director, Devon also faced many obstacles in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, but quickly launched all programs virtually in less than a week after most physical spaces had shut down. During this crucial time, Devon also set up a condom and in-home HIV testing delivery service. It was also brought to light during the pandemic that there was a significant increase in food and housing insecurity among the LGBTQ+ community on Long Island. Devon acquired emergency funding to provide food and hotel gift cards to clients in need.

**Jonathon Rendina, PhD** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology at Hunter College, based in New York City. Dr. Rendina has had a prolific career focused on stigma and its impacts on LGBTQ health, having published more than 100 peer-reviewed publications and received more than \$20 million in National Institutes of Health-funded research grants. Dr. Rendina leads Hunter's PRIDE Health Research Consortium, a community-embedded academic research organization focused on LGBTQ and HIV-related health for marginalized populations. Dr. Rendina is a mentor to students from diverse backgrounds and is setting the stage for the next generation of researchers to focus on health equity issues and people living with HIV.

## **Drug User Health**

**The Alliance for Positive Health's Harm Reduction Team** made extraordinary efforts to ensure that their clients continued to receive the services, harm reduction supplies, prescriptions, and care they needed when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Based in Northeastern New York, the Alliance's Syringe Exchange Program (SEP) and Drug User Health Hub serve a large, rural geographic area, which includes Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Washington and Warren Counties. The rural nature of syringe exchange and Hub participants made it difficult to maintain service delivery when clients could not access in-person services. The SEP team filled their cars to the brim with supplies and travelled hundreds of miles each day to furnish life-saving HIV and hepatitis C prevention supplies, including syringes, sharps containers, naloxone, as well as safer sex, safer injection and safer smoking kits.

**The ACR Health Drug User Health Hub and Syringe Exchange Program Team** based in Syracuse, New York, faced tough times in 2020 and furloughed 70 staff due to funding shortfalls caused by COVID-19. These shortfalls caused significant reductions in staff. The Drug User Health Hub staff was reduced from ten to four, and the Syringe Exchange Program went from seven staff to one director. Despite the circumstances, health services and overdose prevention training in Syracuse, Watertown, and Utica never faltered. This team continued to provide quality, life-saving services and enrolled new clients into those services, with minimal staff. Their steadfast commitment to the health and well-being of the Central New York Community is exemplary and deserving of this recognition.

**The Washington Heights CORNER Project (WHCP) and its Harm Reduction Educators** have provided outstanding services to people who use drugs during the COVID-19 pandemic. WHCP staff selflessly provided Syringe Exchange Program services to their clients, 65% of whom are homeless. Sometimes creativity was a necessity. WHCP staff removed iron gates from a window of one of its sites to pass harm reduction supplies through and created a socially distant phone area for clients to safely speak to their care managers. WHCP's dedication and commitment to providing services did not stop there. A trailer was set up; buprenorphine prescriptions were filled; harm reduction supplies were available; opioid overdose trainings were held often; virtual counseling sessions were set up; and food and clothing were made available. Providing these services was no easy task. However, each morning, the dedicated harm reduction educators returned renewed, never knowing what the day would bring.

**Roberto Gonzalez** is the Syringe Exchange Programs Manager at ACR, a not-for-profit, community-based organization based in Central New York. When COVID-19 hit, Roberto went to work immediately to ensure the Syringe Exchange Programs could continue to provide essential, life-saving services to the community. Roberto never lost sight of the mission to End the Epidemic in New York State, even when he was faced with providing essential services while simultaneously keeping his team and clients safe from COVID-19 exposure. Roberto's continued dedication, commitment, and advocacy for individuals who inject drugs is not only an asset to ACR Health and the community, but to everyone working to reduce the stigma faced by clients.

## **Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)**

**The Oswego County Opportunities Health Education Team.** Located in Oswego County, New York, about 40 miles north of Syracuse, the Health Education frontline team works to reduce the impact of sexually transmitted infections throughout Oswego County. Geographically, Oswego County encompasses a large, rural area impacted by generations of poverty and lack of access to resources, including transportation. The Health Education Team works with community stakeholders and provides education on sexual health topics county-wide, including teen pregnancy prevention, HIV/STD/hepatitis C prevention, contraception, condoms and other safer sex supplies, evidence-based education, and harm reduction.

**The Monroe County STD Clinic** is based in Rochester, New York. The dedicated nurses, nurse practitioners, data, project, and clerical staff of the Monroe County STD Clinic have a long history of providing comprehensive walk-in sexual health services. The team's commitment to keeping the doors open and services running during the COVID-19 pandemic has been extraordinary. The group held daily planning sessions and utilized out-of-the-box problem solving to develop procedures as COVID-19 evolved. These changes allowed them to maintain safe operation for in-person visits, implement telehealth and teledoor visits, and, despite obstacles, the clinic was able to diagnose and treat individuals with syphilis and gonorrhea without any decline in the number of individuals reached. The approach to sexual health has undergone tremendous evolution over the last 25 years, and this team has advocated for and embraced those changes at every opportunity.

## **Hepatitis C**

**Peter Emery** is a dedicated Patient Navigator at ACR Health for the Hepatitis C Patient Navigation program, based in Central New York. Pete's compassion and dedication to the people he serves is inspiring and has led to successfully initiating hepatitis C treatment and services for 140 community members. Of the 140 people served, 121 successfully completed treatment. Pete has been an advocate for the health and wellness of New Yorkers for over five years. Pete uses a person-centered approach and is committed to empowering individuals to prioritize their health.

**Billy Garcia (Posthumous)** Billy was the linkage to care manager for the Washington Heights Corner Project Hepatitis C Linkage to Care Program. He was personally responsible for linking more than 200 people to hepatitis C care. However, Billy did so much more than that. Through his work, he was able to link countless others to housing, mental health services, and substance use services. Billy was a remarkably kind, calm, and caring presence in the lives of people who often had very little. He went out of his way to make everyone feel welcome at Corner Project. Billy acted as a bridge between people who use drugs and the medical system, often accompanying individuals to appointments or advocating for them with doctors and others in the health care system. Billy was beloved by everyone who knew him and a true light in the world. Billy left this world in June 2020 and is survived by his two amazing children, Jeremy and Esmerelda Garcia.

### **Youth Sexual Health**

**Joanna McClintick** is the Youth Sexual Health Coordinator at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center (The Center) based in New York City. Joanna has provided years of management and leadership of youth sexual health education and programming. Joanna developed and implemented the Youth Advocates for Safer Sex program, including an initial pilot with James Baldwin High School. The Youth Advocates for Safer Sex program empowers youth to design creative HIV prevention messages and health information targeted to their peers. The program at The Center provides inclusive, sexual health education classes to fulfill the necessary health credit needed to graduate. The success of this program has been expanded to more schools, including a virtual format. Joanna is a licensed clinical social worker and received a Master of Social Work from Hunter College.

### **Ken Dunning Trauma-Informed Care Advocate Supporter Award**

**Onondaga Nation HIV/AIDS Founders** Cissy Elm and Barb Johnson (Snipe Clan) are two dedicated individuals educating the Native community about HIV/AIDS. Cissy and Barb were chosen by the Native American Leadership Commission on Health and AIDS, and the American Indian Community House during the 1990s, to lead the conversations. Cissy and Barb worked tirelessly to research the perception of HIV/AIDS in the Native community of the Onondaga Nation. After presenting their findings to the Native American Leadership Commission on Health and AIDS, teaching began in several New York State Native Nations. Cissy and Barb laid out the fundamentals of how to

approach Native and non-native people to not be fearful of the, then unknown, effects of HIV/AIDS. They developed several programs that evolved around cultural teachings, which helped to promote trust and respect. Cissy and Barb are being recognized for the excellent work they have done to lay the foundation of HIV/AIDS education in the Native populations in a respectful and meaningful manner.

**Steven Carroll** is currently a Family Nurse Practitioner and Director of the SAFE Program at the Center for Safety & Change based in Rockland County, New York. Steven embodies the spirit and commitment that Ken Dunning ethically lived by around trauma-informed care. As the Director, Steven works with victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, and other crimes. Steven is the first person that a sexual assault victim trusts and is a man of great ethical morale and commitment to believing survivors. Steven commits his work to be proactive, pro-humanity, and pro-LGBTQ+. He exemplifies service that includes safety, choice, collaboration, empowerment and cultural competency.

**Jennifer Cuffee-Wilson (Shinnecock/Montauk)** of Blossom Sustainable Development on the Shinnecock Nation has always maintained a commitment to healing, wellness, recovery, recognizing the impacts of trauma, understanding the dynamics of historical traumas, and how all these factors have impacted Indigenous people and many others. Jennifer has led several community members along their path of healing and helped them to recognize and move to overcoming traumas they have experienced. Jennifer personifies how wellness and healing can mend the residual impacts of trauma.

The following individuals are being recognized for their significant role in providing factual education to young people participating in this year's virtual World AIDS Day event, focusing on sexual health, gender identity, STI and HIV prevention. They represent young people from upstate and downstate regions and share their personal life experiences.

**Brandan Campbell**

**Adrian Centeno**

**Noah Sanatkar**

**Roberta Thomas**

**Cheyenne Velasquez**

*Those receiving an award are being recognized for their commitment, contribution and response to improve and promote the health and well-being of all New Yorkers thus contributing to New York State's plan to end the AIDS epidemic.*

## **Dr. Linda Laubenstein Annual HIV Clinical Excellence Award**

The New York State Department of Health AIDS Institute established the Dr. Linda Laubenstein Annual HIV Clinical Excellence Award in 1992. The award honors those physicians who, besides providing the highest quality of clinical care for people with HIV/AIDS, are also distinguished by their compassionate manner and their wholehearted involvement in the ongoing effort to achieve comprehensive care for persons with HIV/AIDS.

The award was created to recognize the physicians who were there early in the epidemic; to applaud those who are educating others about emerging changes in the available scientific research and clinical information about HIV/AIDS; to acknowledge those who have participated in the process of establishing medical standards for HIV care; and to commend those physicians who serve both as clinical leaders and as compassionate care providers with every individual patient. The Dr. Laubenstein Award represents an opportunity for the AIDS Institute to highlight the contributions of physicians or other clinicians whose record of service has been extraordinary and to publicly thank them for their accomplishments.

### **2020 Recipient**

**Jerome Ernst, MD**  
Chief Medical Officer  
Amida Care

**The Capital Region NAMES Project Chapter  
A Program of The Albany Damien Center**

Dedication of an AIDS Memorial Quilt panel from family members who have lost a loved one and a panel from the Albany Damien Center.

**Tomás Fábregas Boudín**

**All members of Albany Damien Center lost  
to HIV/AIDS**

***Thank You!***



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*A Program of The Albany Damien Center*

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