



Date: Monday, October 21, 2019.

To: The NYU Community

CC:

Andrew Hamilton, *President of New York University*

Katherine Elizabeth Fleming, *Provost of New York University*

Leah Lattimore, *Director of the Center for Multicultural Education and Programming*

Marc Wais, *Senior Vice President of Student Affairs*

Carlo Ciotoli, *MD Executive Director Student Health Center*

Jun Mitsumoto, *MD, MPH Associate Medical Director for Primary Care, Student Health Center*

Alyssa LaFosse, *Sexpert, Student Health Center*

Chris Woods, *Director of LGBTQ+ Center*

Christopher Griffin, *Assistant Director LGBTQ+ Center*

Subject: World AIDS Day at NYU + University Participation in the Global Fight to End AIDS

To whom this may concern,

We write to you on behalf of marginalized students living with HIV/AIDS at NYU, by way of the Student Government Assembly which serves as a representative of the student body, as well as on behalf of and with the support of: The NYU LGBTQ+ Center, The Student Disabilities Union, The SGA Health and Wellness Committee, the School of Professional Studies Student Association of Applied Studies, The Gallatin School of Individualized Study, as well as the Wellness Exchange.

Despite the presence of a 'sexpert' counselor on campus (something most students remain unaware of), the student body has, for many years, experienced a shortage in the availability and accessibility of sexual health resources on campus. Historically, the neighborhoods surrounding NYU's Washington Square Campus have constituted what is considered by many to be the birthplace of the AIDS epidemic as we know it.¹ Yet, students living with HIV/AIDS on our campus struggle with a complete absence of support, as well as appropriate physical and mental health resources. HIV+ members of the NYU community have suffered from a blatant

¹ The Social Impact Of AIDS In The United States. Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US); 1993. 9, The HIV/AIDS Epidemic in New York City. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK234564/>

lack of awareness and ignorance demonstrated by both faculty and other students, as well as from representatives of the NYU Student Health Center. Currently, there are no HIV+ representatives at NYU that serve to protect the interests of students living with HIV/AIDS.

On several occasions, HIV+ students have reported professors and health professionals in the Student Health Center referring to HIV as 'AIDS', exhibiting the degree of insensitivity not only across our campus, but in medical and psychiatric environments as well. It is extremely traumatizing for any HIV+ individual to have HIV referred to as 'AIDS' in the context of their treatment or education, since an individual with HIV can live a healthy long life, and AIDS implies that the individual is in a terminal state. After 'recovering' from the experience of a diagnosis, during which you are faced with the possibility of your imminent death, it can be exceptionally traumatizing for an individual to be re exposed to that feeling, a textbook example trigger of an event that may produce lifelong Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms. When an HIV+ person on effective treatment hears their doctor or teacher or even counselor, refer to the virus as 'AIDS', they are immediately transported back to the first time they got the results of their bloodwork, and the simple sensation of absolute, indescribable terror.

Students who have been diagnosed with HIV at the Student Health Center have also reported an extreme lack of sensitivity following their individual diagnoses, and being treated as mentally 'unstable' by NYU crisis counselors. Other students who have received this life altering diagnosis on NYU's campus have described the designated HIV/AIDS counselor at the NYU Student Health Center as "completely unaware" of how to handle recent HIV diagnoses, asking recently diagnosed students if they were "okay" and if they "needed anything" when the students were in a state of traumatic shock.

These students are then released back to the street with limited mental health or medical support, forcing them to look outside of the NYU community for a variety of resources that they require to survive this experience. The NYU Student Health Center does not provide this type of long term care. Following diagnosis, our school fails at providing any and all support resources for HIV+ students, putting the student in extreme danger of falling into a trap of isolation, depression, and self-harming or suicidal behaviors. There are no options for these NYU students to receive the quality mental health treatment that they need, nor is there a single HIV support group or any other group dedicated to the care of positive individuals on campus. Those who have recently experienced a diagnosis are much more likely to take their

own lives.² It is negligent and irresponsible on behalf of the University, to not take a more proactive and preventative approach to protecting the community from new infection rates and the detriments of HIV/AIDS related stigma. We are outraged.

World AIDS Day, on December 1st, is an opportunity for local and international communities to engage in awareness-raising events, as well as a chance for educational and health institutions to provide sexual health resources and information on prevention and stigma. Representatives of the NYU Student Government, as well as student leaders from the School of Professional Studies, aim to bring these crucial events to the NYU community as a celebration of World AIDS Day, and to demonstrate NYU's dedication to ending the global AIDS epidemic.

Hosting these awareness raising events at NYU is incredibly important for several reasons: key organizations involved in the global fight against HIV/AIDS, including UNAIDS, have established 2030 as the goal for ending the virus worldwide.³ We currently have all the necessary tools-- but funding, a lack of information and awareness, and global health inequalities currently stand in our way. As mentioned prior, NYU's main campus is located in the historic heart of the AIDS epidemic in the United States. As a university with extensive resources, both financial and educational, it is our duty as members of the NYU community to step up and do our part in ending this global epidemic.

World AIDS Day Week will consist of three days of events during the first week of December to educate and engage students in discourse surrounding the HIV epidemic in the United States, with a focus on college-age populations. In addition, during the course of the week there will be multiple opportunities for HIV and STD/STI testing in various locations around campus.

We are coordinating these events in our community to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS at a crucial moment in history; since 2017, following decades of relative calm, we are now starting to see a resurgence of HIV/AIDS on a national scale.⁴ In the American south, new annual rates of diagnosis remain as high as 20,000. In

² Pebody, Roger. "Suicide Accounts for 2% of Deaths in People with HIV, Twice the Rate of the General Population." [aidsmap.com](http://www.aidsmap.com/news/apr-2017/suicide-accounts-2-deaths-people-hiv-twice-rate-general-population), April 6, 2017.
<http://www.aidsmap.com/news/apr-2017/suicide-accounts-2-deaths-people-hiv-twice-rate-general-population>.

³ "The AIDS Response in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Joint Work, Shared Gains." UNAIDS. https://www.unaids.org/en/AIDS_SDGs.

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. HIV Surveillance Report, 2017; vol. 29. <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/library/reports/hiv-surveillance.html>. Published November 2018.

regards to non-HIV STD/STIs, rates of Syphilis and Gonorrhea infections in college students ages 18 to 24, reach as high as 50%, with 25% percent of these new diagnoses being in college age women.⁵ Ensuring that NYU is invested in promoting holistic sexual health education on campus and providing sufficient access to resources for its students is paramount to driving down rates of new diagnoses.

We are proposing that NYU enacts the following changes:

1. Official recognition from the school of World AIDS Day.
2. An increase in awareness and resources specifically dedicated to HIV/AIDS prevention on campus.
3. We demand the official school recognition of World AIDS Day Week workshops and events.
4. We demand that NYU express its commitment to partaking in the fight to end AIDS by 2030, as the largest educational institution in an area historically ravaged by HIV/AIDS, and to protect its own student body from the increasing rate of new HIV diagnoses.
5. We demand that NYU Wellness Exchange contract an HIV+ professional to fill the role of HIV counselor, as we feel that doing so would increase HIV+ students' comfort level in a medical and mental health treatment setting, as well as our understanding that the best way for change to take place in the lives of NYU students living with HIV, and the quality of healthcare that they receive, would be through hiring an individual who is personally familiar with the population in question, not someone who has learned about HIV in a purely clinical setting, and has no personal experience with the specifics and intersection between HIV and mental health. HIV is not just a viral infection. It is a social condition.
6. We demand that NYU Housing and Residential Life work with student leaders to organize a system of information distribution to incoming first-years and transfer students about PrEP and PEP and where to access said medication, as well as the basics of staying healthy as a sexually active young adult. We believe that such a program would greatly benefit the student body's ability to stay informed, infection free, and in control of their own bodies.
7. Finally, we demand that the Student Health Center, in collaboration with student leaders and other agencies on campus, initiate a campaign of awareness to reduce the effects of social stigma against people living with HIV (for example, the New York City Health Department's U=U campaign).

⁵ "The AIDS Response in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Joint Work, Shared Gains." UNAIDS. https://www.unaids.org/en/AIDS_SDGs.



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