

SPEAKER BIOS

» Leslie McGorman, MPPA | AIDS United | Senior Director of Policy and Strategy



Leslie McGorman (she/her) serves as the Senior Director of Policy & Strategy at AIDS United. She comes to the role with 20 years of health-policy experience ranging from state legislative affairs to non-profit consulting. Most recently, she directed policy and advocacy for a trade association representing frontline HIV clinicians and credentialed providers. Leslie has served as a long-time federal lobbyist, including with a leading political and advocacy organization focused on preserving and expanding reproductive rights. There she led a team of health care lobbyists and was considered a nationally recognized subject matter expert on the status of reproductive rights in the United States.

» Michael Elizabeth | Director of Public Health Policy | Equality Federation / U.S. People Living with HIV Caucus



Mike is the Director of Public Health Policy at Equality Federation. They lead the Public Health Department, which mobilizes state partner organizations to leverage their advocacy capacity to influence Public Health policy and ensure effective implementation of those policies, with a focus on HIV and other health issues that disproportionately affect LGBTQ+ communities. They have spent the last 14 years rooted in LGBTQ+ political and community organizing ranging from LGBTQ+ policy work with state and local elected officials in Texas to HIV advocacy fighting against HIV Criminalization laws and for adequate public health funding and culturally competent prevention services. Most recently, Mike was elected as Vice Chair of the U.S. People Living with HIV Caucus. Mike is very proud of their role as former President of the Houston LGBTQ+ Political Caucus, growing the organization to be one of the most diverse and largest membership-driven LGBTQ+ civil rights organizations in the South, which held local elected officials accountable to the LGBTQ community while helping elect pro-LGBTQ+ candidates.

» Leisha McKinley-Beach | CEO | Black Public Health Academy



Leisha McKinley-Beach author, thought leader, inspirational strategist, trainer, and community organizer. Mrs. McKinley-Beach is the founder and CEO of The Black Public Health Academy. Leisha also serves as a consultant who provides training on Black health issues including HIV, medical mistrust, racism in public health, cultural humility, and community engagement. She has been fortunate to participate in nationally recognized projects such as PrEP in Black America, Gilead Sciences Champions of Change: A Celebration of Black Women Changemakers in HIV, Viiv Risk to Reasons national movement to retire the word "risk" associated with sexual health for women, the Florida Department of Health Sistas Organizing to Survive, a first-ever statewide campaign to address HIV among Black women, and initiatives to engage faith-based communities in the HIV response across the South. Leisha is a 2023 inductee into the University of Florida College of Health and Human Performance Hall of Fame.

» Kathryn M. Garner | Executive Director | AIDS Services Coalition (ASC)



Mrs. Garner is the Executive Director of the AIDS Services Coalition in Hattiesburg, MS. Her experience in program development and implementation span over her 42-year career as a city planner, with an emphasis in grantsmanship, program implementation and organizational development. Under her leadership since 2005, ASC has grown from serving less than 50 clients annually to over 2400 annually. ASC is the provider of non-medical services of first and last resort for rural Mississippians living with HIV. ASC now provides HOPWA for 73 of 82 counties in MS. She was awarded a National Human Rights Award by the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus in 2017 and was selected as one of the POZ 100 Women for her outstanding work in HIV/AIDS community. In 2019, Signature Magazine selected her as its "Best Unsung Hero." She and her wife of 36 years, The Reverend Dr. Susan Hrostowski, have one son, Hudson.

» Cedric Sturdevant | Executive Director | Community Health Prevention Intervention Education & Research



Cedric Sturdevant serves as Executive Director of Community Health PIER, a Mississippi Delta-based organization committed to addressing HIV through prevention, advocacy, and community empowerment. With over 20 years of experience in HIV-related work, Cedric brings a deeply rooted, community-driven perspective shaped by both lived experience and a strong background in grassroots organizing. His work spans HIV prevention, long-term survivor support, youth engagement, and policy advocacy—with a focus on dismantling stigma, advancing racial and LGBTQ+ justice, and building sustainable, peer-led leadership. Under Cedric's leadership, Community Health PIER has adapted to a rapidly changing landscape by launching the Resilient Voices Network—a peer-led initiative elevating the voices of long-term survivors and Black gay men in rural areas. This program, alongside the organization's expansion into mobile outreach and digital tools, reflects Cedric's commitment to innovation, equity, and community-led responses that meet people where they are and prepare them for the future.

» Daniel D | Creator | D3 Consulting LLC



Dr. Daniel D. Driffin has dedicated 16 years to supporting HIV-impacted communities across the South. As the Creator and Senior Advisor of D3 Consulting LLC, he helps organizations engage men of color in healthcare. With degrees in biology and public health, plus a recent DrPH from Georgia State University, Daniel focuses on community-driven solutions for better HIV outcomes.

» Tykeysha Boone MPH, CNC | Lead Strategist | Ty Boone Consulting



Tykeysha "Ty" Boone MPH, CNC, Ty Boone is Principal and Lead Strategist of Ty Boone Consulting, where she supports mission-driven organizations in strengthening infrastructure, developing fundable programs, and preparing for long-term sustainability. With over 25 years in nonprofit and public health leadership, she has worked with HIV-focused organizations for more than 18 years, supporting efforts in prevention, education, community engagement, and grant development. Ms. Boone has taught thousands of students and nonprofit professionals across the country through her work in higher education and national training collaborations. Her focus areas include prevention, capacity building, program design, and funding readiness—delivered through practical, systems-based strategies. She is the author of *Be Worth Funding*, a guide for organizations working to improve their funding preparedness. Through her collaborative work, she helps organizations navigate an evolving public health and funding landscape by offering tools and strategies that support ongoing growth, responsiveness, and measurable impact.

» Dr. Athena Cross, DrPH | Vice President and Chief Program Officer | AIDS United



Dr. Athena Cross, DrPH, is a leader in public health and advocacy, known for her transformative work in women's health and HIV/AIDS awareness. With nearly two decades of executive experience, she currently serves as Vice President and Chief Program Officer at AIDS United, driving initiatives that secure funding and expand service accessibility. Dr. Cross holds a Doctor of Public Health from UNC-Chapel Hill and has led groundbreaking projects at organizations like Planned Parenthood and Medicines360, focusing on equitable healthcare access and community empowerment. She is also an Adjunct Professor at The George Washington University, imparting her expertise to future public health leaders.

» Christopher Mathews | CEO & Founder | Emory COMPASS Coordinating Center



Christopher Mathews is the Capacity Building and Technical Assistance Manager at the Emory University COMPASS Coordinating Center, where he supports HIV-focused organizations in strengthening infrastructure, sustainability, and strategic leadership, with more than a decade and a half of experience in HIV-related work, including prevention, care, advocacy, and a nonprofit development approach that is grounded in public health, social work, and a deep understanding of community-based practice. Christopher specializes in helping emerging organizations navigate change and build resilience through culturally responsive technical assistance and values-driven planning. His work emphasizes equity, sustainability, and community-centered leadership. Recently, he co-led a multi-state leadership training series that included sessions on organizational development, strategic communication, fundraising, and strategy development, equipping grantees to adapt to shifting political, funding, and public health landscapes. His passion lies in building strong, mission-driven organizations that are prepared to grow, respond, and lead in an ever-changing environment.

» Edric Figueroa | Director of Zero Homophobia/Zero Transphobia Initiatives | Latino Commission on AIDS



Edric Figueroa (they/he) is a queer, first-generation Peruvian-American advocate with over 10 years of experience addressing HIV disparities and LGBTQ+ equity. At the Latino Commission on AIDS, they combat homophobia and transphobia nationally. Previously, Edric made history as the first ACT NOW: END AIDS Coalition Coordinator and spent six years supporting LGBTQ+ survivors of violence at Seattle's Northwest Network before returning to Atlanta in 2019. Committed to their community, Edric serves on the board of Latino LinQ, advancing HIV prevention for Atlanta's Latine population. Their writing appears in the anthology *Between Certain Death and a Possible Future: Queer Writing on Growing Up with the AIDS Crisis*, and in 2022, POZ magazine named them one of the "100" most impactful HIV activists in the U.S. Passionate and dedicated, Edric continues to fight for justice at the intersections of health, race, and queer liberation.

» Kayla Gore | Co-Founder & Executive Director | My Sistah's House



Kayla is a nationally recognized advocate, published author, and nonprofit founder dedicated to advancing the rights and dignity of TLGBQ people, with a focus on Black and Brown transgender women. For decades, she has coordinated homeless services, led outreach, and championed housing justice, bodily autonomy, and racial equity. She has worked with leading social justice organizations including the Transgender Law Center, OUTMemphis, SONG, Black Lives Matter Memphis, Memphis Community Bail Fund, Planned Parenthood, and the Transgender Strategy Center. Kayla is the co-founder and Executive Director of My Sistah's House (MSH), a Black trans-led organization breaking down barriers to housing and homeownership for marginalized communities in the South. She leads the #TinyHouseProjectMSH, which has developed 11 homes—with more in progress—to provide permanent, affirming housing for Black and Brown trans women in Memphis. Her work meets urgent shelter needs while building generational stability through ownership and sustainability. Learn more at www.mshmemphis.org.

» Jean Hernandez | Latine Program Director | Centro de Acceso para Latinos de Alabama-AIDS Alabama



Jean Hernandez, the Latine Program Director for AIDS and founder of El Centro de Acceso para Latinos de Alabama. She is a medical interpreter and HIV preventive specialist. She established on 2013, Somos Nosotros- the first and only program for Latine living with HIV/AIDS and their loved ones in Alabama. She advocates for language access, social justice and access to healthcare for immigrants. She established on 2019 REAL, the first and only program for LGBTQ Latine in Alabama. In 2016, POZ Magazine recognized Mrs. Hernandez as part of POZ 100 for her work to end the HIV epidemic in the South. In 2022, POZ magazine recognized her as an honoree of the 100 Latino Advocates for her work to end the HIV Epidemic in the USA.

» **Simone Phillips | Director of Training and Technical Assistance | Washington University, Saint Louis STI/HIV Prevention Training Center (PTC)**



Simone Phillips is the Director of Training and Technical Assistance at the St. Louis STI/HIV Prevention Training Center, Washington University School of Medicine, and the Principal of SPG Group, LLC, a consultancy specializing in facilitation, leadership development, and whole person learning. She has more than 20 years of experience designing and leading professional development initiatives in HIV/AIDS prevention and care, CHW and peer workforce training, stigma reduction, and culturally responsive practices. She is recognized for her engaging, high-energy workshops that blend insight, story, and strategy. Simone has led sessions at national conferences, trainings, and convenings across the country, creating learning environments that spark new thinking, foster connection, and equip participants with practical tools. Her work has shaped national projects such as Improving Access to Care, Peer Linkage and Re-engagement of Women of Color with HIV, and the Black Women First Initiative. Her life experiences, studies, and career have been driven by a commitment to enhancing the well-being of humanity. She ensures that people feel seen, heard, understood, and valued. Simone's mission is to cultivate healing and support people and communities in leading with authenticity, accessing their power, and envisioning new possibilities for collective growth and well-being. Her hobbies include tree hugging, birding, traveling and adventures with her niece and nephew.

» **Bec Sokha Keo, MSW, PhD | Research, Language Justice, Public Impact Scholar | SUSTAIN COMPASS Coordinating Center at the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work**



Dr. Keo, pronounced "gow," (they, them), is a scholar and activist committed to justice focused research, education, and solidarity movements. They have been involved in sexual health, gender affirmation, and HIV scholarship and community practice since 2010. They are an outdoor "enthusiast," aspiring woodworker, and proud parent of two dogs, a cat, and a turtle.

» **Marcus A. Stanley, MPH, MCHES® | Director of Programs 2 | University of Houston**



A dedicated public health professional with over two decades of leadership in HIV prevention, community engagement, and health equity, Marcus A. Stanley, MPH, MCHES® currently serves as a senior leader at the University of Houston, overseeing initiatives that promote inclusive health practices and community wellness. As a member of the American Public Health Association and a Board Member of Cardea, he has supported hundreds of organizations through strategic planning, fundraising, and policy advocacy to advance health justice. Recognized as Georgia Southern's 40 Under 40, he has served as Past President of the University of Houston's Social Work Staff Council and participated in NIH Clinical Trials Training programs. An advocate for marginalized communities, he assisted in the curation of Black Men in Public Health (Facebook social group) and led the HIV Prevention Action Coalition. A sought-after speaker and strategist, Marcus has contributed to national and international forums, championing community-driven, culturally responsive solutions to health disparities.