



CHPC
CONNECTICUT HIV
PLANNING CONSORTIUM

OCTOBER 2021

The CHPC is an integrated, statewide prevention and care planning group comprised of diverse partners—including persons living with HIV.



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MISSION STATEMENT:

To create a coordinated statewide prevention and care system in which the rate of new HIV infections is reduced, and those who are living with and affected by HIV/AIDS are connected to appropriate care and support services.

CONNECTICUT HIV PLANNING CONSORTIUM UPDATE



The September CHPC meeting featured one of the annual highlights of the CHPC calendar: the **"VOICE OF THE PEOPLE"** panel. Seven panelists shared insights from their lived experiences on this year's panel topic: innovative strategies to reach and engage priority populations. The panelists reflected on their experiences as HIV care and prevention service providers and/or consumers to share their challenges, lessons learned, successes, and their stories.

Some panelists specifically spoke about their experiences related to pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), including the messages they have received about PrEP, barriers to accessing PrEP, and how those barriers have - or have not been - addressed. Other panelists shared their painful experiences with stigma, how stigma can pose a barrier to accessing needed services, and their thoughts about how we can all - including service providers - create safe, stigma-free spaces.

"To reach digitally-savvy populations, we leverage social influencers who transcend geographic locations and exist in digital clusters."

- Cecil Tengtenga, ENRICH Lab at Yale

"I'm from an era when not using a barrier meant not protecting your partner. It's important for providers to understand that some people may not trust PrEP because it doesn't feel as tangible as a condom."

- Karina Danvers

"Education is the key - at the provider, community, and consumer level."

- Seja Jackson, PhD, APRN-BC, AAHIVS

"To me, it feels like PrEP offers an extra level of security, even for people who aren't having lots of unprotected sex."

- Will Love

"People stop seeking services because front desk staff and other providers lack cultural humility in how they speak to people living with HIV. Providers seem to forget that they're just like me."

- Pat Kelly, Peer Support Specialist

"I have seen people in the waiting room treated as if they are less intelligent, homeless, or a drug user. Even if they use drugs, they should be treated with the utmost respect. We are all human."

- Luis Irizarry

"Young people today may share needles because they think HIV is cured and not a big deal. People think they can live with HIV, but they don't have to be infected - it's avoidable."

- Charles Hardy

Click here to Register for the October 20th Quality Management Summit

Also, stay tuned for information on a special presentation the CHPC will host in November.



Every September, National Recovery Month aims to educate Americans that substance use treatment and mental health services can enable people with mental or substance use disorders to live healthy and rewarding lives. Recovery Month celebrates success stories to reinforce the message that behavioral health is essential to overall health, prevention works, treatment is effective, and people can and do recover.

REFLECTING ON NATIONAL RECOVERY MONTH

By Roman Barksdale

Community Health Worker, Harm Reduction & Prevention Department, Apex Community Care



As I reflect on my unique position as a Community Health Worker (CHW) with a strong background in substance use, I find myself more able to have authentic conversations with those

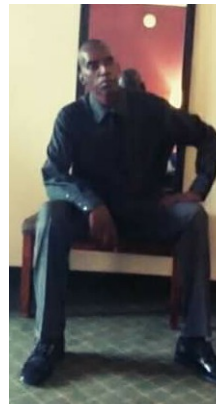
around me. With authenticity comes a decrease in stigma related to substance use and HIV. It's particularly important to have the support and trust of those using substances in order to properly serve them and have these kinds of conversations. When I approach potential participants, I always introduce myself, indicate the agency in which I work, and look for cues that indicate they're not interested in talking at that moment. I think it's crucial for outreach workers to develop a comfortable relationship, while also keeping outreach and service delivery as priorities—not to mention maintaining confidentiality!

Many things have changed in the Harm Reduction and Prevention field since I began my career. Most notably, there are now things like: Narcan for the public; syringe services, including harm reduction kits with things like cookers, sterile water, and cotton; rapid HIV and Hep C testing (we're talking 60 seconds with the INSTI HIV test!); and PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis). We now also have Peer Recovery Coaching and Peer Engagement Specialists, which empowers those with lived experience to lend valuable support and resources to those on their recovery journey.

I strongly encourage programs to lean on peers for several reasons. First, peers have access to different social networks, such as PWID (people who inject drugs), the LGBTQ community, or the faith community. They may also be able to gain trust quicker than other people. Finally, peers often know the best locations for outreach efforts and can foresee potential challenges to getting folks interested in services ranging from detox to HIV testing.

My Story of Recovery

as told by Victor Acevedo



Victor Acevedo has chosen to share his recovery success story, explaining, "If my story touches at least one person, that would make me happy."

Victor believes that, if he had not been arrested and sent to jail in 1998, he never would have found out he had HIV or overcome his addiction. "I was crying like a little boy when I got diagnosed," Victor recalls, "I thought my life was over."

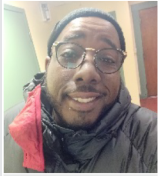
Before his diagnosis, Victor was using narcotics and did not care about his health. His HIV diagnosis and confinement made him think about how long he had to live and what he wanted from life, and his mind "did a 360." He read up on HIV and realized he could have a normal life - a better life - if he got clean and took care of his health.

When he returned home in 2003, Victor says, he "started with a clean slate." He stayed away from people who used drugs and started taking better care of himself. Victor believes his will power has helped, but he also credits his family and fiancée, who has stayed by his side and "walked the walk" with him for 21 years. "You have to have the will to succeed in life," Victor explains, "If you have someone you love, you want to do right, not just for you - but for them."

With the support of his "team," Victor keeps his medical appointments and takes his meds, and his HIV is undetectable. "Every day I wake up, I'm grateful," Victor declares. "My life is great. I'm clean and sober, and I love attending Connecticut HIV Planning Consortium and Consumer Advisory Board meetings and soaking up knowledge." Reflecting on his journey and looking towards his future, Victor turns a classic expression on its head, saying, "You can always teach an old dog new tricks."



COMMITTEES



CREATIVE CHAIR

Christian Brooks
Advancing CT Together (ACT)
 Creates the content that goes into PPCT materials and campaigns



RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT CHAIR

Alixe Dittmore
Greater Hartford Harm Reduction Coalition (GHHRC)
 Examines effective HIV Prevention messaging from around the globe & decides what campaign ideas & promotional materials PPCT produces



COMMUNICATIONS CHAIR

Taylor Edelmann
Apex Community Care
 Disseminates PPCT materials & campaigns via social media

FEATURED CAMPAIGN

PPCT's brand new Superhero Campaign is up, up & away! This original series will feature the Prevention Pack, a cast of superheroes who make it their mission to take on Dr. Stigma and his henchmen, like Mizz Information! Expect lift off in the next couple months!



NEW PPCT WEBSITE COMING SOON!

Since its creation, the Positive Prevention CT (PPCT) workgroup has always been an HIV Prevention Messaging group, charged with creating social media content, campaigns, and promotional materials. The workgroup's website was a public-facing information hub, decorated with colorful condoms designed to encourage any viewer to "click for information." The goal was to drive people to our website to learn about HIV Prevention and Care, HIV testing locations, and more.

Over the last few years, initiatives such as Getting To Zero and In It To End It have emerged with websites that play a similar role as the PPCT website. After some deliberating, PPCT has therefore decided to switch things up. Rather than competing with these new sites and providing similar public health information, the PPCT website will shift to focus on our hardworking Community Health Workers and HIV Prevention and Care teams.

This fall, PPCT will proudly reveal the new and improved PPCT.org website - fully capable of assisting anyone who works in the HIV field. The new site will include information on: past and current PPCT campaigns; our Distribution Center; the Connecticut Department of Public Health's HIV Prevention and Care sites; and trainings - both live and those held on the CT Train platform. The site will also have links to documents required to conduct HIV/HCV/SSP testing and fieldwork, and a landing page where providers can learn about Connecticut's HIV planning councils and workgroups so they can stay involved.

We are excited for the reveal of our new and improved site and look forward to hearing what you think. Keep an eye out for a CHPC announcement coming your way soon!



UPCOMING MEETINGS

OCT 11th

NOV 8th

DEC 13th

PLEASE NOTE:
Meetings are virtual until further notice.

Contact Michael Nogelo at Nogelo@xsector.com for a meeting invite!

If you or your agency has an initiative or practice you'd like to share in the next PPCT Providers' Corner, please let us know by contacting tedelmann@apexcc.org



COVID-19: STILL HERE

LET'S BE REAL: We wish we didn't have to include this section in the News & Notes.

Last spring, with millions getting vaccinated, COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths all declining, and masking and distancing guidance relaxing, it felt like life was getting back to normal and we were close to putting the pandemic behind us.

Then, the number of vaccinated people started to level off and the Delta variant arrived. According to the Connecticut Department of Public Health (CT DPH), there were almost 14 times more new COVID-19 cases in Connecticut during the last two weeks of August than during the last two weeks of June.

We are still in the grip of this pandemic. So, let's take a moment to learn about the new Delta variant, to remind ourselves of what we already knew, and to get a few wellness tips.

COVID-19 DELTA STRAIN *Vaccination is your best protection.*

What we know.

1.

Delta is much more contagious than the other COVID-19 virus strains.



2.

Unvaccinated people are most at risk.



3.

A recent study from the U.K. showed that children and adults younger than 50-years-old were 2.5 times more likely to become infected with Delta.

4.

Headache, sore throat, runny nose, and fever are common symptoms of the Delta strain. Cough and loss of smell are less common symptoms.



5.

By the end of July, Delta was the cause of more than 80% of new U.S. COVID-19 cases.

6.

If you are fully vaccinated (two weeks after your last vaccine dose) and become infected with the Delta variant, you can spread the virus to others.



How to protect yourself and others.

Get vaccinated.

- Vaccines are effective against severe illness and death from variants of the virus that cause COVID-19, including the Delta variant.
- COVID-19 vaccines are safe, and free!
- Infections happen in only a small percent of people who are fully vaccinated, even with the Delta variant. When these infections occur among vaccinated people, they tend to be mild.



Wear a mask.

- To maximize protection from the Delta variant and prevent possibly spreading it to others, continue to wear a mask in public, even if you are fully vaccinated.



Watch out for COVID-19 symptoms.

- If you have symptoms of COVID-19, you should get tested and stay home and away from others. If your test is positive, isolate at home for 10 days.
- COVID-19 symptoms in fully vaccinated people can be similar to allergy symptoms. Make sure to take precautions when experiencing ANY symptoms.

July 29, 2021 • Source: CDC, Yale Medicine



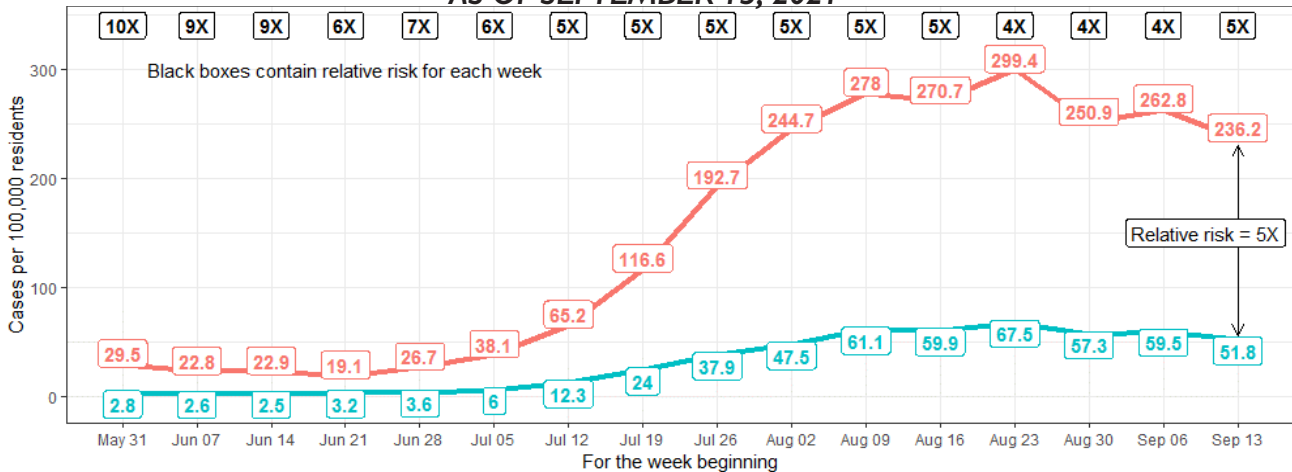


WHAT WE ALREADY KNOW.

While public health guidance has shifted in many ways, one thing has remained constant: vaccination remains the most effective tool for protecting yourself, your loved ones, and your community from COVID-19. CT DPH data shows that, as of September 1, unvaccinated people in Connecticut had the following relative risk compared to vaccinated people:

- 5 times higher risk of being infected with COVID-19
- 13 times higher risk of being hospitalized with COVID-19
- 6 times higher risk of dying from COVID-19

CASE RATE BY VACCINATION STATUS, CT AS OF SEPTEMBER 13, 2021



Source: COVID-19 DPH Reports Library

Fully_Vaccinated — No — Yes

MENTAL HEALTH TIPS.

During any infectious disease outbreak, timely and accurate information plays a critical role in controlling the spread of illness and managing fear and uncertainty. Knowing what to do helps people feel safer and enhances the belief that they can take meaningful steps to protect themselves. The Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress offers the following tips:

1. STAY INFORMED.

Obtain current information from trusted sources, such as the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization.

2. EDUCATE.

Follow and share basic information about hygiene to reduce spread of illness, such as handwashing and cough etiquette.

3. CORRECT MISINFORMATION.

Help correct inaccurate information and misperceptions by sharing credible, established public health resources.

4. LIMIT MEDIA EXPOSURE.

Use media enough to make informed decisions, then turn it off.

5. ANTICIPATE AND ADDRESS STRESS REACTIONS.

Accept that stress represents a normal reaction, but take steps to minimize and address it: keep normal routines, take part in enjoyable activities, focus on positive aspects of your life and things you can control; seek support from friends and family; and engage in stress reduction techniques and physical activity.



CONNECTICUT'S COVID-19 PORTAL has a wealth of information and resources. Connecticut residents with general questions about COVID-19 can call the CT Virtual Assistant at (833) 250-7633 or the 2-1-1 Connecticut Hotline 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Relay services are available for the deaf and hard of hearing at 7-1-1.



WORLD AIDS DAY

DECEMBER 1, 2021



ADVOCACY THEN...



On **December 1, 2021** communities across the globe will come together to show support for people living with HIV and to remember those who have died from AIDS-related illnesses in observance of the 34th annual World AIDS Day.

WORLD AIDS DAY takes on special significance this year because 2021 marks the 40th anniversary of the first reported cases of what later became known as AIDS. World AIDS Day 2021 therefore presents an opportunity to reflect on the history of the HIV/AIDS epidemic from 1981 to the present - where advances in HIV prevention, care, and treatment offer hope for a long, healthy life to people who are living with, or at risk for, HIV and AIDS.

ADVOCACY NOW...



Communities throughout Connecticut will commemorate World AIDS Day with a wide range of events in which community members can stand together to remember those who have died, to show support for people living with HIV, to reflect on 40 years of struggle and progress, and to express commitment to facing the challenges that remain in front of us. Contact a local HIV/AIDS service provider in your area for information about events in your community. The CHPC will also send information about local events to everyone on its email list.

For information on the 2021 World AIDS Day theme, Visit the UNAIDS website at www.unaids.org/en/World_AIDS_Day

HIV Workforce Upcoming Trainings

The CHPC **Needs Assessment Projects (NAP)** Team has been focused on strengthening Connecticut's HIV workforce by helping to coordinate training opportunities. Visit the CT Train website and look for CHPC listserv announcements to register for the following upcoming virtual trainings.

- **The Universal Experience of Trauma - Socio-Cultural Guidance for a Developmental Trauma Informed Approach:** October 13, 2021, 10 am-12 noon; Dr. Jose-Michael Gonzalez, Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services
- **Motivational Interviewing:** November 15 and 16 and December 6 and 7, 2021. Half-day sessions (times to be confirmed); Chip Tafate, CCSU Professor



Stay tuned to the CHPC listserv and CT Train for information on two more training opportunities NAP is planning for this winter. These trainings will cover substance misuse and mental health issues, including supporting people living with HIV who face these challenges and helping them access care.

To promote upcoming training opportunities in future newsletters, please contact Michael Nogelo at nogelo@xsector.com.



Hepatitis C in Connecticut

Absolutely anyone can have Hep C and not know it. Be a part of the knowing.



What is Hep C?

Hepatitis C (Hep C) is a liver disease caused by the Hepatitis C virus. Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver. The liver is a major organ that processes nutrients, filters the blood, and fights infections. While anyone can have Hep C, once you know your status, this disease can be treated and cured!



AGE

Born between 1981-1996?
Millennials make up **36.5%** of new Hep C infections.



ABOUT
21%

of people with HIV
have Hepatitis C

Hep C & HIV

Around 62-80% of injection drug users with HIV also have Hep C. Having both HIV and Hepatitis C more than triples the odds for liver disease, liver failure, and liver-related death. This means testing is all the more important for those at risk for both HIV and Hep C – and testing is easy!



RISK FACTORS

- Injection drug use
- Being born to mother with Hep C
- Being HIV+
- Tattoos and piercings
- Blood transfusion & organ transplant before 1992
- Being in prison
- Having sex with a Hep C+ person



Average time for
Hep C test results

Silence Stigma. **Get Tested.**

Getting tested for Hep C is the only way to know if you have it. Rapid Hep C tests are available at health clinics with results in 20 minutes. In-home tests are available as well. No matter which way you choose to test, you can know your status quickly, and get treated and cured if you test positive.

Silence Stigma. **Seek Treatment.**

If you have a positive Hep C test result, you will need to talk to a doctor about the best treatment option for you.



SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- Fever
- Tiredness
- Dark urine
- Jaundice (yellowed skin)
- Clay-colored poop
- Belly or joint pain
- Nausea/vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Loss of appetite



of treatment cures 90%
of people with Hep C

Silence Stigma. **Get Cured.**

Over 90% of people with Hep C are cured with just 8-12 weeks of treatment. Hep C cures are covered by most Medicaid and Medicare policies, and major private insurers. Speak with your healthcare provider for details. An end to Hep C is in sight!

For a testing site near you, **visit: ct.gov/HepC**

For all other questions, please **email: HepCinfo.dph@ct.gov**

test. treat. cure.

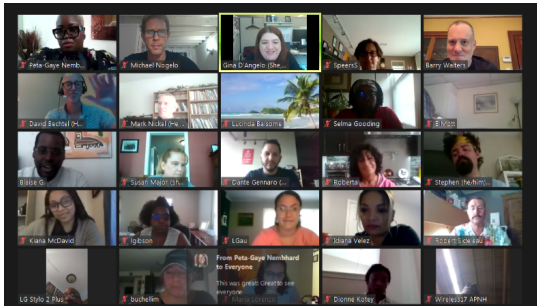


DPH is an equal opportunity provider. Call 860.509.7801 if you require aid/accommodation to participate fully and fairly. Visit www.ct.gov/dph for requests for proposals and other DPH information.



QUALITY MANAGEMENT SUMMIT

ENDING THE HIV EPIDEMIC: EQUITY, STIGMA, AND ENGAGEMENT



WEDNESDAY
October 20, 2021
9:30am to Noon

Please register for the webinar by October 13 at the below link. You can also contact Dave Bechtel at bechtel@xsector.com for more information

[Click here to Register for the Webinar](#)

The goals of this free Quality Management Summit include:

- Addressing critical issues that will help us end the HIV epidemic in Connecticut:
 - Increasing the use of PrEP among Black / African-American men and women
 - Reducing sexually transmitted infections (STIs), particularly among young people
 - Engaging all people living with HIV in care, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic
 - Assessing and addressing stigma
- Inspiring participants to engage in quality improvement projects

The online Summit will feature keynote speakers Dr. Valerie Earnshaw - a national expert on stigma and health inequities, and Bridgeport City Councilman Jorge Cruz who will share his lived experience with stigma and engagement in care. Presenters from across Connecticut will share promising practices and lessons learned from their quality improvement projects.

Sponsored by the CHPC's Quality and Performance Measures (QPM) Team



CONNECTICUT HIV
PLANNING CONSORTIUM
866.972.2050

NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE

Victor Acevedo
Taylor Edelmann
Stephen Feathers
Carl Ferris
Dante Gennaro
Clara Loyd

CHPC MEMBERS NEEDED

The CHPC needs new members to begin in 2022!
If you are committed to the CHPC's HIV care and prevention mission and can participate in monthly meetings, please apply by October 31, 2021.

[FOR AN APPLICATION, CLICK HERE](#)

VISIT ct hivplanning.org, or call 203-772-2050 ext 30.
All are encouraged to apply.

The CHPC particularly needs applicants from the following populations:

- People living with HIV
- Representing New Haven, Middlesex, or Tolland Counties
- Males
- Age 29 or younger