



THE EPIC MOVEMENT: OUR RATIONALE, PROMISE, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#BLACKCISGENDERWOMENMATTER



For more information, contact the EPIC Movement at:
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Our Rationale for Taking Action

Because our lived experiences matter, and our voices deserve to be heard.

Black cisgender women living with HIV face unique challenges stemming from the intersecting layers of discrimination and oppression they endure. Systemic racism, gender bias, and HIV stigma converge to create a hostile environment that impacts our access to care, mental health, and overall well-being. The time has come for us to recognize the urgency of this issue and provide the necessary resources to address it effectively.

We must understand that the intersections that we are speaking about today are not the sole fault or blame of any individual, but are the result of the structural violence that permeates our society, the brunt of which is often borne by people who have been marginalized and devalued by those in power for how much they have in terms of income, how they look, whom they love, how they choose to make a living, and how they adapt or cope with ongoing trauma or unresolved trauma. Without justice and equity, these intersecting issues and increased exposure to traumatic lived and life experiences serve to silence Black cisgender women living with HIV.

Our Promise: The EPIC Movement

Because it is time for us to speak for ourselves and not have anyone else speak for us. I am my own voice.

The EPIC Movement is a new organizing effort to uplift and address longstanding unmet needs of Black cisgender women living with HIV in policy, federal and local priorities, funding, leadership, decision-making, and overall HIV programming. We promised ourselves that we would no longer wait to see if the government, the public health system, and the community would decide to turn their attention back to us, nor can we afford to remain faceless and silent considering this neglect. It was out of this promise that the EPIC Movement was born.

The EPIC Movement is about transformational systems change. We believe that the public health endpoint should not solely be about viral suppression but seek to achieve social and health outcomes for Black cisgender women diagnosed and living with HIV. Therefore, strategies for ending the HIV epidemic in this country must include opportunities to live the life we deserve - one of optimal quality and purpose - not just for ourselves but for our loved ones presently and for generations to come. The EPIC Movement is part of our legacy as Black cisgender women living with HIV in America.

Our Recommendations

Because the National HIV/AIDS Strategy (NHAS) states that Black women are the only group without progress.



To ensure that Black cisgender women are thriving in all aspects of their lives, any plan or strategy to end the HIV epidemic in this country must:

- **Move Beyond Evidence-based, Data-Driven Solutions to Incorporate Experiences**

Our decision-making and work within the HIV community must be based on accurate and comprehensive data. While data-driven strategies are crucial for informed decision-making, they should be complemented by a holistic approach that considers the unique needs and experiences of the community. We must adopt a more holistic approach incorporating community-informed and community-centered strategies, believe in communities' unique cultural experiences and intuition, and prioritize a "race and resource equity lens" for policies, services, and research. Evidence encompasses not only hard facts and data but also individual qualitative experiences. Both approaches are essential for creating effective and sustainable solutions.

- **Provide HIV Care and Treatment Services that Acknowledges Harm & Promotes Resiliency**

Advocate for funding trauma-informed, culturally responsive, and gender-responsive care and services to address the intersectional harms arising from explicit and implicit institutional and organizational bias experienced by Black cisgender women living with HIV. This advocacy is not merely a matter of healthcare but of justice, equality, and human dignity. By investing in trauma-informed care, we acknowledge the need for holistic healing and the importance of creating a safe and supportive environment for all communities.

- **Ensure Status Neutral Addresses Stigma and Structural Continuity.**

As a Black cisgender woman living with HIV, navigating the social and cultural norms perpetuating stigma and shame can be challenging. Let's get serious about ending the stigma killing Black cisgender women living with HIV by investing in real and effective community-led responses. Additionally, support forming strong sister networks and organizations that promote educational activities, small group interventions, civic participation, and political advocacy to decrease internalized stigma and counter the isolation and loneliness Black cisgender women living with HIV experience. Moreover, ensure that the current HIV healthcare infrastructure is not morphed into a service continuum – from prevention to care – that cannot meet the current and future needs of the people living with HIV community.

- **Take Action to Strengthen Social Factors that Facilitate Positive Health Outcomes.**

It is crucial to address critical social factors that impact the quality of life for Black cisgender women living with HIV. These factors include having a sufficient income to live, affordable quality housing, various transportation options, access to mental health services, aging with dignity, harm reduction services, and decriminalizing HIV. These issues can determine whether a person with HIV will thrive or die prematurely. We must work to eliminate these barriers and ensure all individuals have the resources and support they need to live healthy and fulfilling lives.

- **Embrace a Definition of Quality of Life that Encompasses Our Cultural Collectiveness or "We."**

It's essential to recognize the valuable contributions that Black women living with HIV make to their communities and loved ones. Despite the challenges and hardships Black women may face, these women have shown incredible strength and resilience in the face of adversity. By including our families and social networks in the conversation about HIV prevention and care, we can empower each other to continue caring for ourselves and our loved ones while helping prevent the spread of HIV to future generations.

- **Make Meaningful Involvement and True Collaboration a Reality.**

As a society, we must create criteria that ensure meaningful involvement of Black cisgender women living with HIV in leadership roles and decision-making roles. We must recognize their experiences and perspectives, as they are essential to finding practical solutions. We must realize that if we do not include them, we are part of the problem. Their involvement in decision-making must be proportional to their experience in all states and jurisdictions. Tokenism will not do; we must strive to ensure their voices are heard and valued.



Who Are We?

The EPIC Movement was birthed on February 16, 2022, in Baltimore County, MD, by a group of Black cisgender women living with HIV at a convening of the EPIC (Enhanced Peer Involvement in Care) Program led by Ribbon. During discussions, the women expressed a strong desire to be seen, heard, and affirmed, and thus, the EPIC Movement was born.

Their message was clear:
OUR LIVES Matter Too!

EPIC Movement is an advocacy network formed to light the way by and for Black cisgender women living with HIV. We are unifying to demand transformational system changes for the betterment of lives of Black cisgender women living with HIV in the United States.

Our Purpose?

As Black Cisgender Women living with HIV; We are amplifying our voices and taking actions because we believe that It's Time for Change.

"We are committed to "Being the change We want to see in Our World"
—FOR US, BY US.



Linda H. Scruggs
Founding Member



Vanessa Johnson
Founding Member



Janet Kitchen
Founding Member



Faye Marshall
Founding Member



Kim Moon
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EPIC Movement
Executive Committee



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