National HIV/AIDS and Aging Awareness Day 2020

Nine key findings from a survey of HIV-positive people 50 and older. Plus: A special report on aging with HIV during COVID-19.

September 18, 2020 By Trent Straube

Friday, September 18, marks National HIV/AIDS and Aging Awareness Day (NHAAD) 2020. About half of people living with HIV in the United States today are 50 or older, and within the next decade, that proportion is expected to jump to 70%. What's more, a growing number of people older than 50 are contracting HIV. To address the unique needs of this population group, The AIDS Institute launched NHAAD in 2008, with the annual theme: "Aging is a part of life; HIV doesn't have to be!"

"Our goals are to emphasize the need for prevention, research and data targeting the aging population and increase medical understanding of the aging process and its impact on HIV/AIDS," writes The AIDS Institute in its latest newsletter. "Through action, we hope to increase the quality of life for people with HIV.... Through awareness, we hope to reduce stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS among the aging population."

Thank you for your support of our initiative to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS in the aging community. Together, we can...

Posted by The AIDS Institute on Thursday, September 17, 2020

In 2020, as the world grapples with the COVID-19 pandemic, The AIDS Institute marks NHAAD with the release of a report titled A Race Against Time: HIV and the Aging Population in the Era of COVID-19. The report quotes the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in noting that the risk

for severe COVID-19 illness increases with age.

For a more general snapshot of the population aging with HIV, check out the survey results recently published by HealthHIV, a national nonprofit that coordinates with other organizations and health care providers on issues surrounding HIV, aging and advocacy. (HealthHIV and The AIDS Institute are two of 30 grantees in Gilead Sciences' "HIV Age Positively" initiative.) Titled HealthHIV's Inaugural State of Aging With HIV National Survey, the report is based on answers from over 830 respondents living with HIV 50 years old or older. According to the report, key findings can be summarized as:

- Over half of the survey respondents are living with at least one comorbid condition—the most prevalent are depression, high cholesterol, hypertension and neuropathy.

- People aging with HIV are engaged in routine care, with nearly all having seen a provider in the last year, and three quarters having seen an HIV care provider in the last six months.

- The majority of respondents report feeling satisfied or very satisfied with their care coordination. However, dissatisfaction was much higher among respondents who had not been linked by their providers to government or community resources, indicating a need for increased provider engagement.

- Respondents report experiencing discrimination when seeking health care services. Over half report experiencing stigma, and approximately a quarter of respondents report experiencing ageism and/or homophobia.

- Nearly all respondents have health insurance, and many are accessing services through Ryan White–funded programs and utilizing their state's AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP). However, over a quarter of respondents cited cost of care as a barrier to seeking care.

- The most frequently cited barriers to care are cost of care, lack of transportation, lack of providers knowledgeable about HIV, lack of convenient appointment times and not being able to find a provider who accepts the respondent's insurance.

- Respondents struggle with lack of social support and isolation. One third of respondents report not having any emotional support system, and almost half of participants care for themselves when they are sick or injured.

- Approximately half of respondents use at least one substance on a daily basis, with alcohol, tobacco and marijuana [cited] as the most frequently used substances. A quarter of respondents also indicated they are or have been in recovery from substance use.

- The majority of respondents currently have stable housing, with 90% living in a house or an apartment that they have owned or rented for at least one year.

In related news, POZ at Home hosted a Zoom discussion Thursday, September 17, titled “HIV and Aging” in which POZ editor-in-chief Oriol R. Gutierrez discussed the challenges of growing older while living with HIV with Sherri Lewis, Derrick Mapp and Jeff Taylor. All Zoom discussions in the series are posted and available for viewing within a few days of the event. To watch them and learn about upcoming events, visit POZ at Home.

This article was updated to note that The AIDS Institute is also a grantee of Gilead’s HIV Age Positively initiative.

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