

5 Key Areas to Focus on to End the HIV Epidemic

AIDS United's Carl Baloney Jr. lays out a framework in this speech given on the 10th anniversary of New York's Ending the Epidemic initiative.

January 2, 2026 By AIDS United and Carl Baloney Jr

The following are the remarks of Carl Baloney Jr., President & CEO of AIDS United, at the 2025 Ending the Epidemic (ETE) Summit "One Journey. One Community. One Mission to End Epidemics," presented December 9 and 10 by the New York Department of Public Health in at the Albany Capital Center in Albany, New York.

"Good morning, everyone.

I'm Carl Baloney Jr., President and CEO of AIDS UNITED. It's truly a privilege to be here with all of you — leaders, partners, colleagues and friends in this work.

And as we continue honoring World AIDS Day,

I want to take a moment to acknowledge the generations of advocates, caregivers, and truth-tellers who brought us to this moment.

We stand on their shoulders today.

This year marks 10 years of New York's Ending the Epidemic initiative.

Ten years of vision.

Ten years of leadership.

Ten years of proving what's possible when community and government move together.

And the theme of this year's Summit —

"One Journey. One Community. One Mission to End Epidemics"—

isn't just a tagline.

It's a reminder of who we are.

And how we've always gotten things done in New York.

Let me tell you something I say often in Washington:

When the nation wants to understand what real leadership in HIV looks like, they look to New York.

You all led the way.

You built a blueprint other states have followed.

And the work you've done — sometimes quietly, sometimes defiantly — has changed lives across the country.

Over the past decade, New York has helped more people know their status,

connected people to care faster,

supported people in staying in care,

and made treatment and prevention more accessible than ever.

You've embraced U=U.

You've expanded PrEP access in ways few states have matched.

You've invested in community-based leadership.

You have changed the landscape.

And you should be very proud of that.

Now — part of leadership is celebrating what's working.

And part of leadership is telling the truth.

And the truth is:

While New York's progress has been extraordinary,

the work is not finished.

We've seen new diagnoses level out instead of continuing to fall.

In a few communities, they're even ticking up.

We've seen stigma continue to show up in people's lives —

not just emotionally, but as a barrier to testing and care.

We've seen the drug supply become more dangerous,

and the overdose crisis create new vulnerabilities.

And I know many of you are navigating serious staffing shortages,

burnout,

and the pressure of doing more and more with fewer resources.

These are not failures.

These are signals.

Signals that the next chapter of ETE must evolve.

From my vantage point at AIDS United —
working in states across the country —
I can tell you that public health itself is being tested right now.
We're seeing attempts to roll back HIV prevention funding.
We're seeing attacks on LGBTQ+ care.
We're seeing harm reduction politicized
at the exact moment it saves the most lives.
Community organizations are stretched thin.
Public health workers are exhausted.
And the cost of doing this work keeps climbing.
And yet — even in that landscape —
New York remains one of the strongest HIV responses in the nation.
You have the infrastructure.
You have the experience.
You have the community power.
And even when the politics get messy,
you have the will.
That's the promise I see here.

And based on the conversations many of us have had —
including what the summit planning leads shared with me ahead of today —
the next decade of ETE will need to focus on a few key areas.
First, we must strengthen and stabilize the HIV workforce.
Your results depend on people —
the case managers, peer navigators, outreach teams, and clinicians
who carry this work every day.
They deserve stability, fair pay, and support.
Second, we must protect and expand harm reduction.
The overdose crisis is changing fast,
and harm reduction has to keep pace.
New York has been a national leader here —

and that leadership is needed now more than ever.

Third, we must close the PrEP equity gap.

PrEP access has grown,

but not always in the communities facing the highest burden.

Black and Latino gay and bisexual men,

transgender communities,

young people,

and women deserve targeted, community-rooted approaches.

Fourth, we need deeper integration of services.

HIV work is inseparable from mental health, housing, food access,

and primary care.

People's lives are interconnected —

our systems must be, too.

And finally, we need an updated ETE blueprint —

one grounded in what has changed,

and in what communities are asking for now.

The original plan was visionary.

The next one must be, too.

And here's the part I want to emphasize:

There is nothing in the current landscape

that New York cannot overcome.

Not the political environment.

Not the resource constraints.

Not the drug supply.

Not burnout.

If anything —

these challenges make the mission even clearer.

Even more urgent.

Even more necessary.

Let me say it this way:

You are not starting over.

You are building on hard-earned strength.
And that strength is sitting in this room.
It's out in your communities.
It's in the history of this state.
It's in the belief — proven again and again —
that when New York takes on a challenge,
New York meets it.

As we honor World AIDS Day and this ten-year milestone,
I want to end with this:
Ending the epidemic has never been only a technical challenge.
It has always been a test of our commitment to one another.
A test of whether we will continue showing up —
for the most marginalized,
for people living with HIV,
for people who use drugs,
for LGBTQ+ communities,
for young people
and older adults,
for each other.

And I have no doubt —
none —
that New York will meet this moment.

You have the community.

You have the capacity.

You have the conviction.

And AIDS United stands ready to walk this journey with you,
shoulder to shoulder.

One Journey.

One Community.

One Mission to End Epidemics.

Thank you —
for your leadership,
your vision,
and your unwavering commitment.
I'm honored to be alongside you in this work."

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<http://beta.docker.tusaludmag.com/article/5-key-areas-focus-end-hiv-epidemic>