

For Us, By Us: Addressing Unique Needs of Black Women in the HIV Response

The Office of Infectious Disease and HIV/AIDS Policy (OIDP) is creating a nationally coordinated initiative for Black cis and trans women.

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In solidarity with the theme of the 2023 US Conference on HIV/AIDS, “A Love Letter to Black Women,” the HHS Office of Infectious Disease and HIV/AIDS Policy (OIDP), led by its Director, Kaye Hayes, MPA, is creating a nationally coordinated, community-driven initiative to improve the lives and well-being of Black women of both cis and trans experience in America and further explore ending the scourge of the HIV epidemic among the community. HIV.gov spoke with the initiative’s co-leads to better understand its impetus and to discuss a recent community meeting in Houston, Texas to enhance the collective ability to address Black women’s unique needs in the HIV response.

“From the beginning, we were all in agreement that, per our mission, it was time to honor those Cs—convening, collaboration, coordination—but to make sure that we create something that is community-driven, so we’re not dictating what Black women need regarding the HIV response.” CAPT Jyl Martin, MPH, CHESR, NHDP-BC, senior policy analyst and Lead, OIDP Engagement Teams, who serves as the initiative’s co-lead shared this with us about the initiative. CAPT Martin serves alongside the initiative’s other co-lead, Dr. Marissa Robinson, DrPH, MPH, OIDP’s Health Equity Specialist Lead. Our conversation also focused on a recent community-driven meeting in Houston regarding the initiative, which supports the goals of both the [Ending the HIV Epidemic in the U.S.](#) (EHE) initiative and the [National HIV/AIDS Strategy](#) (NHAS).

Innovative Initiative Will Center Black Women

Dr. Robinson shared that the Houston meeting was a small gathering of multi-sectoral leaders (community, advocacy, governmental, policy) aimed at resetting, recharging, and rebuilding the HIV response regarding the epidemic’s disproportionate impact among Black women. She emphasized that “it’s important that we acknowledge that the diaspora of Black women includes both cis and trans women, and we’re looking forward to exploring and supporting the unique

needs of each population. We are meeting the community and letting them know, we see you, we hear you.” Although the initiative is in its beginning, an essential element is that it centers the needs and voices of Black women without dictating what those needs are and should be. “It has to be deliberate and include the community’s buy-in. It includes no parameters, it’s unconventional and allows the community to tell us their wish list as we cultivate and consider their needs,” shared CAPT Martin. We also discussed the meeting participants’ feedback, which signaled to CAPT Martin and Dr. Robinson that they were off to a great start in the creation of a viable, sustainable program that takes into account the voices of Black women.

Via a feedback survey, one meeting participant shared that, “This meeting effectively centered the lived experience of Black women through the lens of HIV prevention, treatment, and care. The depth of relevance that the lived experience has on how we [...], as community members, federal partners, and advocates approach this work and the prioritization of Black women in the nation’s Ending the HIV Epidemic can be led by none other than this cohort.”

Next Steps for the Initiative

The community will collaborate on naming the initiative, which will entail a “for us, by us approach,” an often-quoted mantra of OIDP’s Director, Kaye Hayes. CAPT Martin and Dr. Robinson shared that the community will continue to serve as the initiative’s co-creators as they plan additional convenings to focus on priority subject areas, such as, for example, HIV prevention, research, awareness, policy, justice, funding, and advocacy.

Be sure to check out our latest [FYI video](#) with CAPT Martin, Dr. Robinson, and CDR Michelle Sandoval-Rosario, DrPH, MPH, as they discuss the initiative’s commitment to supporting efforts to end the HIV epidemic among Black women.

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