

FALL 2021 | WNCAP



RISE ABOVE

SERVING THE WHOLE PERSON

WNCAP Client Newsletter

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WORLD AIDS DAY



Wednesday, December 1, 2021

Ending the Epidemic - Equitable access, everyone's voice:

The Asheville Art Museum will be participating in World AIDS Day by featuring an installation called "A Day With(out) Art" where they will take part in the world-wide premier of the new documentary "Enduring Care." The installation will include infographics where they will spotlight the voices of local community members and their own stories about what it's like living with HIV. The exhibit will be open Wednesday December 1st from 11am to 6pm. for more info go to wncap.org.

WNCAP will also be featured on the *The Asheville View*. They will be hosting a podcast featuring John Chaffin, Jody Cross, and Broderick Disroe. The panel will be discussing WNCAP's efforts in creating equitable access to care and bringing everyone's voice to the table in our own effort in ending the epidemic.

 **ASHEVILLE
ART MUSEUM**

World AIDS Day
December 1



THRIVING INTO OUR GOLDEN YEARS

HIV & Aging - Adapting and Overcoming

By Ron Burgin, Gemini Hartford, and Jody Cross

Friends, it is happening for the first time: those of us living with HIV, those of us who once managed, against all odds, to survive HIV and its stigma, have gotten older. In the last decade, the percentage of people living with HIV over 50 years of age has risen from 8% to over 50%, and models indicate that, by 2030, the figure will surpass 75% *(cdc.gov/age/olderamericans). These promising data has been possible thanks to the life saving meds that are available to us in the form of new and safe antiretroviral treatments. These medications have made it possible to elevate the life expectancy of people living with HIV to that of the general population. It is therefore a triumph, but also a challenge: it is no longer about gaining years, but about the quality of our lives.

It is the challenge now: to discover why those of us over 50 years of age suffer more comorbidities (comorbidities are secondary health conditions), associated with aging, as we may have acquired these comorbidities years earlier than the general population. 87% of us have a medium or high risk of suffering from chronic coronary disease and cancer cases, especially those associated with smoking, drinking, or lifestyle. Furthermore, our risk of developing kidney failure triples and 73.3% of us have a moderate or high risk of suffering from chronic illnesses such as kidney disease and type 2 diabetes, among others**(hivpractice.com/hiv-care). All of this means that, at 50 years of age, those of us living with HIV have health problems more typical of a 65-year-old without HIV. This is why we must attend regular check ups with our doctors to properly address possible health concerns.

For those of us living with HIV, our “Golden years” are presented with many challenges. To curb these challenges, we need medical support and socialization. WNCAP offers a support group, case management, peer navigation, and opportunities for client engagement and advocacy *** (wncap.org).



"It is no longer about gaining years, but the Quality of our lives."



*<https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/group/age/olderamericans/index.html>

**<https://www.hivpractice.com/challenges-of-aging-with-hiv/>

***<https://wncap.org/>

COVID-19 - WHAT ARE MY RISKS?

Living and thriving with HIV during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

When the pandemic first began we all feared the unknown. It was a new normal that none of us really knew how to grasp, especially for those of us living with HIV. Though antiretroviral drugs may make us virally suppressed, we were still faced with not knowing how COVID could affect us. The science just wasn't quite there yet and it still isn't... but we do know more.

Today, almost 2 years after the first case of COVID was confirmed in the US, we have a better understanding of it. During this time, doctors and scientists have had time to study risk factors of COVID for those of us living with HIV. As people living with HIV know best, studying viruses takes time, resources, and energy. This requires many different teams of researchers studying and analyzing each other's results. Therefore, we can't yet conclusively determine our risk severity compared to the general population without more data.

Whereas we do not yet have full clarity, we do know a few things. We know that people who are virally suppressed are much more likely to successfully battle COVID and we know that the COVID vaccines have been proven to be a safe and effective way to prevent severe illness.

Many studies have been done researching COVID mortality rates among people living with HIV. One of those studies specifically examined the impact of antiretroviral therapy on the outcomes of COVID infection. The study concluded that risk of death due to COVID was 10 times higher in patients who were not receiving their antiretroviral medication at the time of COVID-19 diagnosis (*Mantilla et. al.).

Many more studies have been done showing the effectiveness of mRNA COVID-19 vaccines. During clinical trials of the vaccines, people living with HIV were included, determining that the vaccine is safe for those of us with HIV. There was also no evidence to suggest that the vaccine could have potential interactions with antiretroviral drugs. Not only can we see the research showing us that it's safe, but it's also highly effective. According to the CDC, between April and September, unvaccinated adults were 6 times more likely to test positive and 11 times more likely to die of COVID than their vaccinated counterparts**cdc.gov.

Over all, we can conclude that for people living with HIV, the best way to avoid serious and fatal illness due to COVID is to keep on top of our medication and ensure that we are up to date on our vaccinations. By keeping your WNCAP Medical Case Manager in the loop on your appointments and medication refills you may be at better odds of maintaining viral suppression. When it comes to vaccinations, if you have not received your first dose it is best to consider scheduling it.



"It's the best thing to do! The overwhelming data showing us it's safe and effective lets us know that getting the vaccine is just the best option for for us all." -Robert Johnson



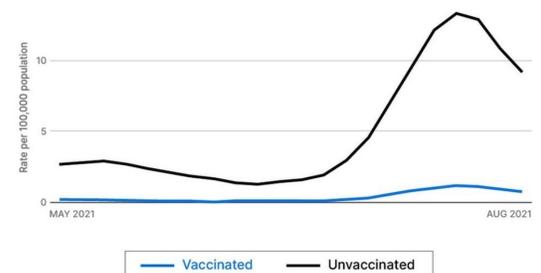
*Mantilla et. al. 2021. 'Mortality COVID-19 in people living with HIV in a private insurance carrier in Colombia'. Poster presented at: The programme ias. 2021, 18-21 July. Bogota, Colombia

**Vaccine Breakthrough/Surveillance and Analytic Team. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7043e2.htm> October 21, 2021

COVID DATA TRACKER

NOW AVAILABLE

Rates of COVID-19 Deaths by Vaccination Status



Find the latest data on CDC's COVID Data Tracker

April 4, 2021–September 4, 2021



AN INTERVIEW WITH WNCAP'S OWN DRAG QUEEN

Yes we have have our own...



The newsletter editorial board had the distinguished opportunity to interview one of WNCAP's own drag queens... yes, we have more than one! One of them, Lane Wagner, a Harm Reduction Community Navigator here at WNCAP, performs drag under the name "Natasha Noir Nightly". Below, Natasha explains how they incorporate activism in their work on the job and on stage.

Q: What does HIV advocacy look like in the drag community?

A: "It's primarily about education and fundraising. When drag queens are involved in HIV advocacy, a lot of times it's at outreach events or fundraisers for specific organizations who are helping individuals living with HIV. A lot of the events I have been involved with have been at UNCA where we have combined drag with HIV education but I've also done a lot of fundraisers for WNCAP. Because I have a platform, I usually speak on the microphone about the importance of testing and knowing your status. I've spoken about PEP and PrEP on stage before and we've really done a lot trying to educate as much as we can while on stage."

Q: What is the Biggest reward you get from being a drag queen?

A: "I have always been a performer. I've been in dance, band, color guard, theater... and I like the fact that I get to combine all of those things into one performance. I get to dance. I get to pick my own music. I get to be my own artistic director but I also get to make an impact with people. I started by doing a lot of kid friendly shows and I got to see a lot of young LGBT people and it was always really inspiring to see how brave they were at such a young age when it took me a much longer amount of time to be comfortable with who I was meant to be. So that's the biggest reward."

Q: How does gender play a role in your entertainment?

A: "So I identify as nonbinary and drag has really helped me understand gender expression a lot more and all the nuances that entails. Lane and Natasha are two very separate entities. My goal with drag right now is to continue to foster an explorative, creative space where more people can be a part of the artform I love so much. Specifically, with the shows I'm trying to direct, I am focusing on interlacing communities... so bringing together drag queens that may have not worked together before and trying to do different stuff such as bringing alternative drag performances to places that may not have seen that kind of drag."

Thriving Together

WNCAP's Support Group

by Jody Cross

After joining Julia's support group, I began volunteer work, and got involved in advocacy endeavors. Since then, I have continued my involvement by becoming a Community Navigator and Co-Chair of the Community Advisory Board. The support group, which consists of all walks of life, is a way to stay connected to other people living with HIV who may see many of the same medical providers in the area and work in various occupations or have retired but want to speak freely with those who represent them. We are friends and mentors sharing news and encouragement twice a month to keep everyone's spirits up with our bond of "extended family". You can join too!

The group meets the first and third Tuesday of every month from 6:00pm to 7:30pm. Clients are welcome to email the support group facilitator, Julia at juliatrobinson1@gmail.com with questions or to be added to the group. Currently the group is meeting virtually over Zoom. Julia will send out reminders with the Zoom information a few days prior to each meeting.



All information presented in this edition of 'Rise Above' was written, researched, and created by Ron Burgin, Jody Cross, Gemini Hartford, and Robert Johnson in collaboration with WNCAP staff.