



Department of Health

ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

HOWARD A. ZUCKER, M.D., J.D.
Commissioner

LISA J. PINO, M.A., J.D.
Executive Deputy Commissioner

August 2020

Dear AIDS Institute Contractor:

PrEP is highly effective at preventing HIV, and we must take every step possible to raise awareness about PrEP. With this in mind, the AIDS Institute is announcing **PrEP Aware Week 2020**, a public education campaign with activities across NYS to be held **October 25–31, 2020**. The first *PrEP Aware Week* was held last year. A wonderful array of events, activities, and sharing took place. This year, we are asking every AIDS Institute-funded organization to join us in working together so that people of all races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, gender identities and abilities are aware of, and can utilize, PrEP.

The theme of *PrEP Aware Week, 2020* is: “*This is Why I PrEP*”. The theme recognizes that PrEP is an individualized approach to HIV prevention and sexual health. “*This is Why I PrEP*” provides a broad umbrella for reaching all New Yorkers with tailored messages about PrEP that will speak to them as individuals and members of different, overlapping, diverse communities.



Studies show that PrEP reduces the risk of getting HIV from sex by about 99% when taken daily (CDC). However, still today, too many people are unaware of PrEP, mistakenly think it is unaffordable for them, don't know where to get PrEP, fear stigma around PrEP, or have inaccurate information about side effects. The intent of the *PrEP Aware* activities is to provide culturally relevant messages that:

- Establish PrEP as a positive, effective way to promote sexual health and wellness;
- Raise awareness of new guidelines that promote individualized PrEP;
- Inform communities that there are many resources to cover the costs associated with PrEP;
- Identify where people can access PrEP in their community; and,
- Dispel concerns about side effects.

PrEP Aware Week strives to bring an end to a major health disparity: Of the 2,481 new HIV diagnoses in New York State in 2018, greater than 85% were among people of color. At the same time, recent data released at the Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections (CROI) demonstrate that rates of PrEP uptake among non-Hispanic Blacks and Hispanics are very low. We must now take every action possible to achieve high levels of PrEP access and utilization across all of our communities.

Certainly, this year's *PrEP Aware Week* is taking place during a time that looks very different from a year ago. New Yorkers have endured much heartache, loss, and uncertainty during the COVID-19 crisis. We understand that this letter comes to you during challenging days at your organization, and in your lives. And yet the communities we serve need us more than ever. PrEP is a positive, effective, and empowering way to prevent HIV and promote sexual health – for everybody, even while staying home.

Attached is a list of possible activities to promote PrEP including: ideas for virtual events; using the *PrEP Aware Week* Social Media Toolkit upon its release in early October; developing educational materials tailored for your audience; and more. Please discuss with your contract manager how your agency will participate.

When we work together, we can do truly great things. Thank you for participating in *PrEP Aware Week*.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Johanne E. Morne".

Johanne E. Morne, MS
Director
AIDS Institute