

HIV/STD/HEPATITIS PREVENTION & CARE UNIT



Quarterly Newsletter

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HIV/STD/Hepatitis Prevention and Care Unit Newsletter

Communicable Disease Branch Program Efforts

A Word about HIV Genotyping from the Communicable Disease Branch

By Molly Deutsch-Feldman

Molecular Epidemiologist, Medical Consultation Unit

What is a genotype?

The word “genotype” refers to the DNA or RNA of a living thing. In public health, it is helpful to know about the genotype of different viruses and bacteria that cause disease. Genotype information is used for a wide variety of public health activities, for example monitoring COVID variants or identifying sources of food poisoning.

How do we use genotypes to improve HIV public health response?

When a person is newly diagnosed with HIV, a health care provider will collect a blood sample to determine the genotype of that person’s HIV. Doctors often use HIV genotype information to help them decide what medicine will be best for reducing a client’s HIV viral load.



Communicable Disease Branch Program Efforts

A Word about HIV Genotyping from the Communicable Disease Branch (Continued)

By Molly Deutsch-Feldman

Molecular Epidemiologist, Medical Consultation Unit

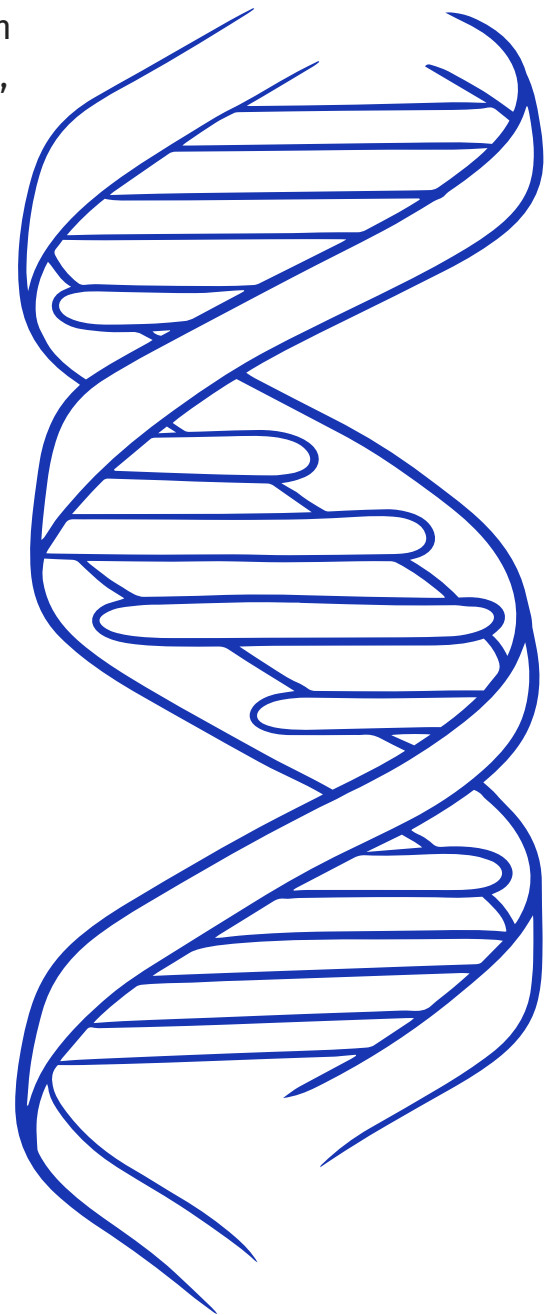
The genotype information is confidentially shared with the North Carolina Division of Public Health by the laboratory. Importantly, the genotype contains information on the HIV organism only; no human genetic information is collected.

For public health purposes, we use genotype information to identify groups with genetically related infections (clusters). Persons who have similar HIV genotypes are considered part of the same HIV cluster. (A 'cluster' in this case simply means HIV strains that are genetically related.) Identifying HIV clusters that are growing rapidly allows us to step in to help prevent new infections and respond more appropriately to the needs of the community. Here's how we do that: people in a rapidly growing HIV cluster who are not virally suppressed and might need help linking to care are assigned to a regional linkage counselor who reviews patients' care histories and determines appropriate support services to offer to help them access care and medication. Since people living with HIV who are accessing medical care and are virally suppressed for at least six months cannot transmit HIV through sex, this reduces HIV transmission significantly and helps people stay healthy while living with HIV.

So now you know why HIV genotyping is important to end the HIV epidemic!

More HIV Genotype Cluster Information on the NCDHHS website:

[Using HIV Genotype Cluster Information in NC PowerPoint Presentation](#)
[HIV Genotype Factsheet](#)



Prevention Program Efforts

The Pill that Prevents HIV

**By Kristena Clay-James
HIV Prevention Coordinator**

PrEP (Pre-Exposure prophylaxis) has been a game changer in HIV Prevention since its inception in 2012. PrEP is simply a pill, taken once each day - much like birth control pills for women - that prevents someone from acquiring HIV during sex. When PrEP is taken as prescribed, it's 99% effective. Most insurance plans and the state Medicaid programs cover PrEP. For uninsured clients, patient assistance programs are available to help lower costs.

To increase access to PrEP across NC, the Communicable Disease Branch (CDB) has launched a statewide project (NCPREP) to increase PrEP awareness and availability of PrEP services. This project supports a statewide PrEP Coordinator and four regional PrEP Coordinators across the state. The goal of the project is to support NC prevention partners in increasing access to PrEP services for eligible people at high risk for HIV. This program primarily focuses on men who have sex with men (MSM), particularly young Black/African American MSM. But don't forget - PrEP is also for women! NCPREP allows prevention partners to collaborate and develop relationships within communities to identify those at most risk for HIV and link them to qualified providers for PrEP.

Agencies funded by the CD Branch for HIV/STD prevention activities are required to educate all clients on PrEP and to make active referrals for eligible and willing clients during testing efforts. The statewide and regional PrEP Coordinators then follow up on these appointments to ensure that these referred clients are linked to a provider and attended the appointment.



Prevention Program Efforts

The Pill that Prevents HIV (Continued)



By Kristena Clay-James
HIV Prevention Coordinator

The CDB also provides capacity building and technical assistance to increase the ability of providers in NC to provide high quality, accessible PrEP services. The PrEP Coordinators develop collaborative relationships with clinical providers and prevention agencies across the State to ensure they are well informed and are able to provide PrEP services within their regions/jurisdictions. The CDB also convened a Statewide PrEP Advisory Committee composed of providers, consumers, academics, and others interested in increasing PrEP access across NC. This body meets every other month and provides community input into our statewide PrEP plan. For more information on NCPREP, contact the Statewide PrEP Coordinator at mark.a.davis@dhhs.nc.gov.

In addition, the Family Planning Medicaid "Be Smart" program has incorporated PrEP into men's reproductive health. The program covers transportation, screening, testing and follow-up visits while taking PrEP and most importantly, allows any man to access PrEP through Family Planning clinics. Additionally, providers in family planning clinics can assist clients in the Ready, Set, PrEP program to help with medication costs. The Medicaid Family Planning clinics are for anyone – women OR men – who are 'reproductive capable; sexual orientation is not a consideration. For PrEP services, apply online at nc.epass.gov or in person at your local Department of Social Services.

PrEP Up! Find a PrEP provider near you by visiting www.prelocator.com and entering your zip code.

Contact a Regional PrEP Coordinator through the following information below:

Region 2, Liz Ramseur, lramseur@alfainfo.org (980) 349-6760

Regions 3 & 4, Rithy Vang, vangr@forsyth.cc (336) 703-3232

Region 6, Hailey Stout, Hailey.Stout@wake.gov (919) 212-8391

TGA, Gabriella Borden, Gabriella.Borden@mecklenburgcountync.gov (980) 314-9328



Care Program Efforts

Housing Opportunities for Persons With AIDS (HOPWA) Fair Market Rent

By Bob Winstead

HIV Care Program Manager

Over the past few years, the North Carolina Housing Opportunities for Persons With AIDS (HOPWA) Program has received increased funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) which we hoped would allow us to house more HOPWA eligible individuals in permanent, stable housing. Unfortunately, the HUD approved Fair Market Rent rates have not kept up with the ever-increasing rental rates in North Carolina. As a result, our HOPWA Project Sponsors have a combined waiting list of 147 clients who are eligible for Tenant-based Rental Assistance, but are unable to locate housing that falls within the approved HUD Fair Market Rent rates. HOPWA program staff within the HIV Care Program have spent many weeks researching current rental rates for apartments and houses in the 71 counties that we currently serve with state HOPWA funding to determine average rental rates for a studio, 1-bedroom, 2-bedroom, 3-bedroom, and 4-bedroom units in North Carolina. Based on the information learned, we have submitted a formal request to HUD to allow us to increase the Fair Market Rents by 150% above the currently approved rates. If HUD approves our request, we will see a significant increase in the allowable rents that could be used to access housing for eligible individuals. For example, in Buncombe County the current approved Fair Market Rent rate for a 1-bedroom unit is \$1,298, and for a 2-bedroom unit is \$1,466. Under our proposal, the approved amount would increase to \$1,947 for a 1-bedroom unit and \$2,199 for a 2-bedroom unit. We aimed high with our request to HUD in case HUD comes back to us wanting to negotiate a lower increase amount. We will let everyone know the outcome once we receive a response from HUD.



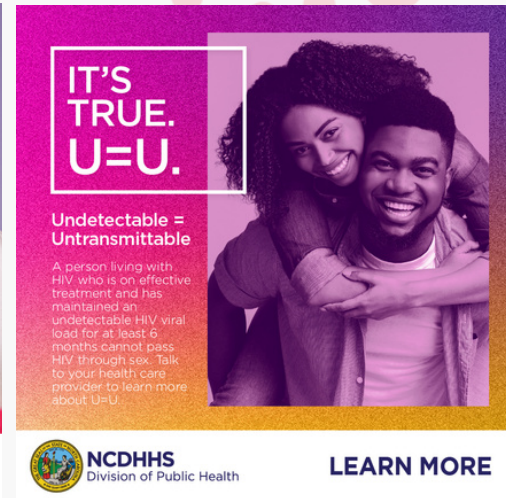
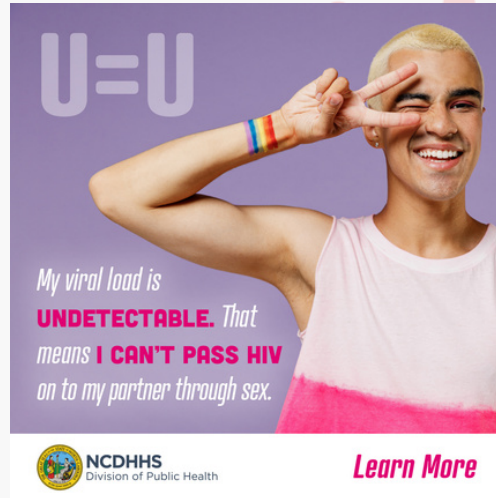
Data to Action Program Efforts

NC DHHS Social Media Toolkits: U=U Campaign

By Luke Keeler

Data to Action Communications and Social Media Coordinator

Are you looking for content to promote HIV prevention, testing, treatment and care on your organization's or personal social media accounts? The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) is launching an Undetectable equals Untransmittable (U=U) campaign to spread awareness and education about the concept of U=U. The U=U campaign is based on studies that have shown that individuals living with HIV who achieve and maintain an undetectable viral load through antiretroviral therapy (ART) cannot sexually transmit HIV to their partners. Please download and share these materials with your networks.



Positively Me Campaign

Be on the lookout for the Positively Me campaign from NC DHHS that will be released shortly! Positively Me is part of a bold approach to eliminating HIV in NC by focusing on prevention, testing and treatment. We believe that this message has the power to break down stigma and promote greater understanding throughout NC communities. We believe that knowledge is power, and that everyone deserves access to the



information and resources they need to lead healthy and fulfilling lives. That's why we're launching this campaign to spread the word about HIV treatment and care, prevention and testing and ways to help reduce stigma and discrimination against those living with HIV, here in our own state of North Carolina.

NC DHHS Program Efforts

Take Pride Now in Your Sexual Health

Take PRIDE in Your Sexual Health: Prioritize your sexual health by practicing safer sex practices, learning more about sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and how to prevent them, getting tested, and getting vaccinated against mpox, if eligible. Left untreated, STIs can lead to increased risk of HIV transmission, long-term pelvic/abdominal pain, infertility, pregnancy complications and other serious health problems. Go to the [Take Pride Now website](#) to learn more and download the [Take Pride Now Pocket Guide](#), shown below, available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).

Vaccines and testing remain crucial tools for reducing risk of transmission and disease severity. Discuss your sexual health and any concerns with a healthcare provider so that you can get the appropriate testing and vaccines you need to remain healthy.



SCAN ME

LEARN MORE:
ncdhhs.gov/TakePrideNow



PRIDE

IN YOUR SEXUAL HEALTH

Prioritize your sexual health. Use safer sex practices. Get tested. Get vaccinated.



NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Division of Public Health

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Division of Public Health

TAKE PRIDE NOW!

TAKE part in safer sex practices. They can lower your risk of exposure to sexually transmitted infections (STIs) which are spread mostly by unprotected sexual contact. This includes anal, oral, vaginal, and some skin-to-skin contact.

- Talk to your partner openly about your sexual health
- Use barriers such as condoms and dental dams to prevent exposure to STIs
- Spend time getting to know your partner(s) and their sexual health
- Get tested!
- Talk to a healthcare provider about PrEP
- Get vaccinated against mpox, if eligible.

PRIDE yourself in prioritizing your sexual health by getting tested regularly for STIs and getting vaccinated against mpox, if eligible. North Carolina continues to ensure equitable access to vaccines through partnerships with local health departments, primary care physicians, Federally Qualified Health Centers, community health workers, and other vaccine ambassadors. Search for free and confidential testing and vaccines for yourself, your partner, or your community. Talk to your doctor or your local health department: www.ncdhhs.gov/LHD

NOW is the time to take the first steps! If left untreated, sexually transmitted infections can lead to more health complications.

- Visit your doctor or local health department to get tested.
- Get vaccinated against mpox, if eligible.
- Get any unfamiliar rash checked by a healthcare professional so treatment can begin immediately.
- Talk to a healthcare provider about other vaccines that may be recommended for you.



LEARN MORE:
ncdhhs.gov/TakePrideNow



IMAGE CREDITS – mpox & vaccination: images used with permission; Syphilis: CDC, Dr. M. F. Rein

Viral Hepatitis Program Efforts

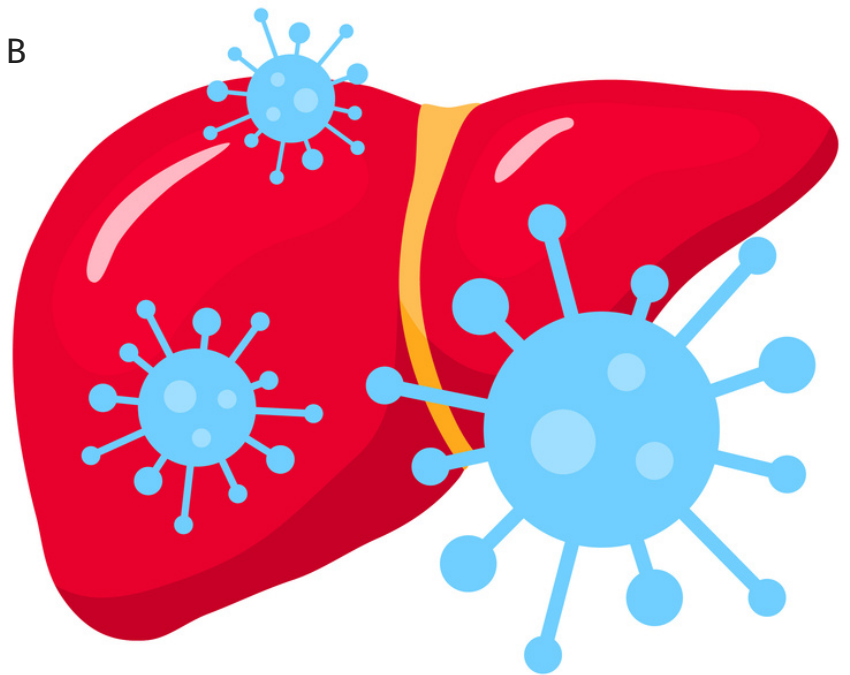
Upcoming Trainings and Program Updates

By Dr. Rick Moore
Viral Hepatitis Medical Director

We wanted to let everyone know that the CDC recommended expansion of Hepatitis B testing guidelines.

Here are the updated recommendations:

- Screen all adults once.
- Use the “triple panel” test to screen: Hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg), core antibody (anti-HBc total), and surface antibody (anti-HBs).
- Offer re-screening and vaccine to people at increased risk (people incarcerated, people with a history of sexually transmitted infections or multiple sex partners, and people with hepatitis C virus infection).



Guidelines are shifting to help close the gap in the number of individuals living with Hepatitis B who are aware of their diagnosis, which currently sits at about 1 in 3 of people with Hep B in the US. The World Health Organization goal is to reach 90% by 2030.

Please reach out to us here at the viral hepatitis team with any questions.

[Dr. Rick Moore](#), Viral Hepatitis Medical Director
[Kayla Ellis](#), Hepatitis C Bridge Counselor
[Anthony Hannah](#), CHAMP Coordinator

Community Corner

Community Quarterly Spotlight

By Esther Ross
HIV HERo, Data to Action Vulnerable Populations Coordinator

Esther has been thriving with HIV for 28 years. She is originally from New York but now resides in Greenville, North Carolina where she serves as the Vulnerable Populations Coordinator at North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services.

Receiving the 2020 Leading Women Society (LWS) Award this year was a total surprise. Leading Women Society (LWS) is comprised of outstanding women from across the country that have lived with HIV for 20 years or more while serving as change agents and advocates in their local communities. The members of LWS are chosen because of their commitment to raising awareness using their own experience to champion accessible HIV testing, prevention education, and more women-centered research.



Each year, SisterLove, Inc. honors 20 women who have lived with HIV for at least 20 years at their signature event known simply as 20/20. As an honoree I was inducted as a member of the LWS Society which proudly consists of over 200 women from all different walks of life who have a deep-rooted desire to eradicate HIV. LWS leaders represent a myriad of professions including HIV Prevention Specialists, Executive Directors, Artists, Ministers, Counselors, Spokespeople, Homemakers, and active advocates on Capitol Hill. Due to COVID, awards were postponed.

Although this work is rewarding, we can at times feel unappreciated, but continue to move forward despite these feelings. I have served the HIV population for the past 27 years from volunteer to peer educator to health educator to medical case manager to executive director to network coordinator and now Vulnerable Populations Coordinator for NC DHHS. In my case, I get through these moments when I feel unappreciated by reminding myself that all things I do is to glorify and honor God for His sustaining power in my life. When I focus on God, I feel better and move forward with brand new strength, grace, and mercy. I must keep self-care up front especially to remain openminded to learning new strategies to end the HIV epidemic.

Community Corner

Community Quarterly Spotlight (Continued)

By Esther Ross
HIV HERo, Data to Action Vulnerable Populations Coordinator

Part of self-care is also making sure you have support. I pour so much into this field however I am grateful for the few special women mentors in my life I can depend on and turn to pour back into life that empowers to continue this work. They remind me what I do is a ministry or calling because of the impact to others. I appreciate them so much as these Queens remind me of the importance in celebrating myself and to lead by example.

I am honored to be a part of Leading Women Society-Sister Love, Inc because its mission “To eradicate the adverse impact of HIV, sexual and reproductive health rights and justice challenges impacting women and their families through education, prevention, support, research and human rights advocacy in the United States and around the world” has been my life’s mantra.

Please visit [Sister Love’s webpage](#) to read more about Esther and learn more information about all the great work SisterLove, Inc. is doing, how to get involved and how you can nominate a sister for a Leading Women Society Award.

Voices from the Community

By Charlotte
North Carolina Community Member

I have a story that I want to share with you that happened to me 8 years ago, which turned my entire world upside down. Before this tragic incident happened to me with this mystery man, I was in a long-term happy relationship with a special man for 11 years. Throughout the years, we had our difficulties and tried to work out our differences. I also realized that he had been cheating on me with my next-door neighbor. When I found out what my friend did, I was terribly upset with him, but I gave him another chance and took him back into my life. And he promised to take a STD or HIV test before I could be with him again, because of the love that we both had for each other. My friend agreed and showed me that he was negative with all his tests. I genuinely love this guy, but he kept doing the same thing years later. So, I decided to end it after 11 years together. I ask God to remove this man from my life, because I did not mean anything to him anymore. I was looking for happiness, someone to love me back and be there when I am hurting, but I came to realize that he had nothing more to show me with his feelings, towards me, but hurt.

Community Corner

Voices from the Community (Continued)

**By Charlotte
North Carolina Community Member**

After being alone and distant from my Ex for a lengthy period of time I met this mystery man at my church one Sunday. My grandson needed help moving something from the truck, and this man came over immediately to give my grandson a hand. I could not believe how heartwarming and friendly he was when I started to laugh and talk to him. This guy wanted to see and meet me again to talk, which was around the middle of January 2017. My feelings became stronger for this man as I began to see him every day. I would even carry this man to work, pick him up from work, carry him food to eat on his job and even go out to eat together at times. I really enjoyed the company with this man for months, until I saw him heavily drunk one day, as though he had a lot on his mind. We talked about drinking and the other rules that I wanted during our relationship. It was 90 days before we kissed and 180 days before we got sexually involved. We also had agreed to meet each other's family. Although I was still in love with my friend of 11 years, I had more feelings for this man that I just met and chose not to have sex with him yet. After knowing him for a while with the rules that I had set throughout our relationship, he wanted to stay over one night at my house, and I let him. During his stay, I asked him when the last time he was involved with someone and he told me to my face and said, "since my wife left me, which was about 3 years or more". He said that he did not have any sexually transmitted infections, HIV negative and had regular visits with his doctor. He asked me to trust him because he was being truthful to me. And I told him that I see my doctor every 3 months and that I was HIV negative also, and I showed him my paperwork from my last doctor's visit. That was the night when we became sexually involved. I did not realize a week later was the night that my world got turned upside down after my 3 month follow up visit. My doctor told me the shocking news, that I tested positive for HIV. The doctor and nurses had to calm me down because I was broken to pieces. When I confronted this man, this man did not look surprised or shocked. All I could say to this man is "did you know about this." He could not say anything. I had to run away to go and be alone and cry out to God. With my faith and prayers, God is the only one that can help me now as I wait on Him for a miracle to change my circumstances. Following all my future doctor visits, I kept praying to God for a miracle before my visits. As years went by each visit worked out in my favor. Took me a while to tell anyone in my family or my special friend of 11 years about my status. But God put it in my heart to share it with my special friend and family. When I decided to share my story with my daughter first, she stood by my side. When I decided to share it with my special friend of 11 years, I made a big mistake disclosing my status to him. He went totally out of control physically and mentally. I saw another side of him. He started treating me differently.

Community Corner

Voices from the Community (Continued)

By Charlotte
North Carolina Community Member

Instead of giving me some type of support, he became rude and angry with harsh words from his mouth towards me and the mystery man that I believe gave it to me. This man even offered me a night out to talk about the situation again, hoping he would understand me and my pain.

This night became one of the most horrible nights of my life. This friend suddenly showed hatred towards me and put me out of his car in the middle of a long and dark road and drove off in the middle of the night leaving me stranded in the storm and rain. This was the second worst day of my life, since the night me and this mystery man slept together and I learned he had HIV.

After wondering and seeking information about this mystery man I found out that this man had gotten HIV from another man living around in my neighborhood, nobody said anything. Through the years, this man thinks I have no idea about him and his male partner. I knew all the time, but I kept silent. But crying in pain I wanted to hurt this man and his male partner. I feel they both knew of their HIV status and chose not to tell anyone while still engaging with multiple sex partners. The Holy Spirit was the reason this man pulled away from me after our night together as things could have gotten worse, had we stayed sexually connected.

Through the years with God's help and I was able to address all the problems that I had to face and deal with being HIV positive. God has been there for me through all of this. All my blood work for every visit has been good and undetectable. My oxygen level was low, and I had to go on oxygen for 6 months. Now I am oxygen free. I had to deal with my elevated level of diabetes. Now my diabetes is normal. So, by eating healthy, working out and attending church regularly in doing the Lord's will, I am able to give back by sharing my story with others and what God has brought me through. I am living a good life, no longer living in bondage. I am free. And I give Him all the praise.

Charlotte



Upcoming Unit Events/Meetings/Deadlines

State PrEP Advisory Committee (SPAC) Meetings

July 12 · September 13 · November 8
1:00 pm - 3:00 pm (Virtual Meeting)

HIV Prevention & Care Providers Meetings

August 4 · November 3
9:30 am – 1:30 pm (Virtual Meeting)

Cultural Humility Trainings

August 4 · November 3
12:00-1:30 pm (Virtual Meeting)

Regional Quality Council (RQC) Meetings

July 14 · October 13
9:30 am – 11:30 am (Virtual Meeting)

HIV Prevention and Care Advisory Committee (HPCAC) Meetings

August 18 · November 17
9:30 am – 12:30 pm (Virtual Meeting)

*These are member specific meetings and if you would like to attend or want to provide input/feedback, please call 919-546-1708.



HIV/STD Awareness Days

There are multiple days throughout the year designated to promote awareness about and acknowledge the diverse populations living with HIV and AIDS. Awareness days are powerful focal points to rally around and make a difference. There are several Awareness days that we want to bring attention to and they can be found on the NC DHHS [HIV/STD Awareness Days webpage](#). Review some of the awareness days and share some of the graphics on your social media channels to spread awareness and knowledge about HIV in your community!

**CHAT & CHECK IN
THIS VALENTINE'S
DAY!**



**NATIONAL CONDOM
AWARENESS DAY!**

