



Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs

Commission Action: Support for *The People's Declaration*

At its September 8, 2025 meeting, the Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs voted to sign on to *The People's Declaration*. In doing so, the Commission affirms its support for community-centered HIV research, the protection of diversity, equity, and inclusion in science, and the defense of policies that safeguard the health and dignity of those most affected by HIV.

See the full text of *The People's Declaration* below:

The People's Declaration

As members of communities living with and disproportionately affected by HIV, we invoke the Denver Principles as we assert our right to be meaningfully represented in decisions that affect our lives. We are outraged by the unscientific and indiscriminate cuts that have been unleashed on the United States' HIV research portfolio. To date, the discourse surrounding these actions has focused largely on the devastation to grants, dollars, and institutions. Here, we center people instead – the communities who stand to suffer the harshest consequences of these actions. Here, we remind the world that the first letter in HIV stands for human.

The best HIV research centers the communities that are most impacted by HIV – not to meet a quota or to favor some over others, but because these communities are where the research is most needed. These communities include women and girls; men and boys; sexual and gender minorities including trans and gender-diverse people; people who use drugs; and Black, Indigenous, and Latina/e/o/x people in the US and abroad. These groups need the research the most because they are the most impacted, but every single person benefits from it. Reducing the impact of HIV in one population reduces the potential impact for all.

Over the past four decades of the HIV pandemic, HIV research has been responsible for scores of new findings on the nature of the virus and countless innovations in diagnostics, monitoring, treatment and prevention, creating tools to improve the lives of everyone living with or without HIV. Furthermore, HIV research has benefitted countless Americans and people around the world by inspiring the discovery of combination therapies to fight diseases such as tuberculosis, malaria, and cancer. We have been collectively harnessing the advancement of science to bring

the HIV epidemic to an end. And we were deploying science-based strategies to hasten the process – until the current regime in Washington, DC took over and the destruction began.

The pursuit of eliminating diversity, equity, and inclusion has led to chaos, confusion, and wholesale destruction of HIV research because these principles are essential to research. There is no question: diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice are foundational to HIV research and to any quality scientific endeavor. And in practice, the long-standing mantra “nothing about us without us” requires that HIV researchers directly engage community members in every aspect of the scientific process.

We demand substantive, meaningful inclusion of community in every aspect of HIV research, from protocol development to study implementation to the dissemination of clinical trial results.

We demand diversity, equity, and inclusion amongst the scientific teams conducting HIV research.

We demand diversity, equity, and inclusion across all community stakeholder engagement activities.

We demand diversity, equity, and inclusion in the recruitment of clinical trial participants who accurately reflect the epidemic.

Because we not only believe in science, we believe in ourselves, including affirming the reality of multiple genders and sexual identities. We demand these communities – these human beings – be represented in any and all scientific endeavors related to HIV, including, but not limited to, clinical trial participation.

Finally, to funders, policy makers, advocates, program implementers, and researchers – we remind you to not comply in advance. Authoritarian bullies thrive on weakness, and our goal is for people and communities living with and disproportionately affected by HIV to thrive – not authoritarians and billionaires who are actively trying to erase our existence. While the threat of losing funding is frightening indeed, the truth is that funding comes and goes. The constant in our work must be the sanctity of scientific principles, an indefatigable commitment to the truth, and trust. The canceled grants and layoffs we are witnessing are horrible. But when they pit funding against our core values, we will always choose values. Nobody wants to lose funding, but the loss of integrity and the loss of trust in science will have far more damaging consequences in the long run. We urge you to weather this storm with us and stand firm in your values, not just for yourselves, but for the people and communities who are and have always been inherently central to this work.

We urge you to act on the following recommendations for:

Federal leaders, including but not limited to President Donald Trump, HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., and NIH Director Jay Bhattacharya

- Reinstatement of grants and jobs that have been cut for the purposes of radical political ideology at the cost of scientific progress, human health, and human life.
- Let science and evidence lead – not politics and hatred.
- Learn the meaning of the words *diversity*, *equity*, and *inclusion* and how they are critical to the advancement of science. By senselessly trying to dismantle these principles from science, you are myopically advocating for homogeneity, inequity, and exclusion, which are antithetical to science and serve no one.

All people

- Support us in our struggle against those who would deny us lifesaving healthcare and erase our very existence.
- Refuse to scapegoat us, which is a tactic used in every authoritarian regime and only serves as a distraction that ultimately ushers in expansive death and destruction in all communities. Recognize that your liberation is tied to ours; nobody can be free until all are free.

Scientists and researchers in all disciplines

- Do not comply in advance. When you are asked to carry out actions that conflict with core ethical standards and scientific principles, do not comply at all. We recognize that non-compliance may be met with consequences, but courage requires a willingness to face repercussions for doing the right thing. Remember that many of us in the community don't get to choose when we are courageous; resilience is a condition of our survival. We ask you to stand with us.
- Remember that people—not politics, publications, or research dollars—are at the center of health-related research. Much of the current research infrastructure was built on the backs of unsung advocates from communities who often continue to suffer health disparities while financial and academic benefits are enjoyed in the ivory towers. Do not abandon us.
- Amplify the voices of advocates. Do not silence or undermine us for fear of us drawing attention to issues that matter to us but may appear controversial to you and your funding streams. When you can't or won't speak out, let us lead on our terms.

HIV advocates

- Know your advocacy history and draw inspiration from it.
- Amplify the work of scientists and how it has positively affected your lives and the lives of your loved ones. Talk to the media. When scientists can't or won't speak out, leverage your positionality to defend research and our representation in it.
- Get involved in every level of decision-making, including the development and implementation of research studies, participation on community advisory boards, and engagement in legislative advocacy.

Political leaders

- Put science, evidence, facts, and objective truth before politics. Regardless of political orientation, all of us will suffer if we as a society can no longer reliably determine what is true and what is not. Let the objective truth guide your decision-making. If you are struggling to determine what constitutes objective truth, consult with people with lived experience, including advocates and respected scientists.

Who We Are

We are members of the HIV community, allies, advocates, and people living with and without HIV who want the best for our communities and for all people who stand to benefit from HIV science – which is everyone. Many of us have been in this fight for decades. Others are early in our careers and have dedicated ourselves to carrying the torch. We want to see HIV research continue to save lives.

[See list of current signatories here.](#)