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HIV stigma and discrimination: Removing barriers to service and healthcare

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Statement of the Problem: HIV discrimination and out-right denial of individuals infected with the HIV virus has continued even with proof of the advances in medicine and understanding of transmission rates. HIV stigma and discrimination restrict vital services and healthcare of HIV positive individuals due to misconceptions of transmission, bigotry, and fear. With medical advancements in anti-viral HIV therapy, there have been tremendous strides in reducing transmission and increasing the overall health of HIV Positive persons. However, stigma and discrimination have stalled the acceptance and understanding of HIV, which in turn affects the rate of care and services sought. This negative effect further pushes the adverse image that is portrayed for these communities

and individuals. With the current rise of bigotry, misconceptions and biases against the LGBT and HIV-positive communities, enforced stigma against those seeking help and who want to serve their communities needs to be evaluated and changed to reflect the modern understanding of HIV. Ending HIV discrimination begins with evaluating the outdated and discriminatory policies that date back to the 1980s and 1990s and using the technological advancements of social media to put forth information. Society's understanding of LGBT and HIV related issues, as well as our social responsibility in the establishment of successful treatment, begins with removing the blinders of gender, race and identity politics which places discrimination on the forefront. Through serving the general interest as a member of the community, understanding of HIV will transition our society to a higher spirit and the organized LGBT/ HIV-positive community shall be reconciled with cooperation and equality.

Biography

Augustine Sciabarassi has his expertise in prevention and adherence in ending the stigma that has surrounded the HIV positive communities in NYC and Long Island. He received a bachelor's degree in Education from SUNY Old Westbury with high honors and has used this experience to help others. His current placement is at The Economic Opportunity Council of Suffolk (EOC of Suffolk), where tremendous gains have been made in retaining clients and stopping the rate of transmission. His interest in ending the stigma associated with an HIV diagnosis arose from the years of experience as a Linkage Care Navigator and as a peer, as well as the personal experience of living with the virus since September 21, 2005. Being able to communicate and share life experiences with other HIV positive individuals, he has been a major contributor to stopping the spread and fear of HIV in NYC and Long Island.

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