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contributors this issue

Writers: L'Monique King, Wendy Lyons, David Aaron Moore, Mikey Rox, Keith Sargent, Terri Schlichenmeyer, Liz Schob

on the cover

Graphic Design by Danny A. Mannanov
Photographer: Adobe Stock

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The focus of *Qnotes* is to serve the LGBTQ and straight ally communities of the Charlotte region, North Carolina and beyond, by featuring arts, entertainment, news and views content in print and online that directly enlightens, informs and engages the readers about LGBTQ life and social justice issues.

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Publisher: Jim Yarbrough
Sales: x201 adsales@qnotescarolinas.com
Nat'l Sales: Rivendell Media, ph
212.242.6863
Managing Editor: Jim Yarbrough, x201,
editor@qnotescarolinas.com
Director of Strategic Initiatives:
Liz Schob
Digital Engagement Specialist:
Tim Kendra-Dell
Sr. Editor: David Aaron Moore,
Editor@qnotescarolinas.com
Copy Editor: Bailey Sides
Production: Danny A. Mannanov, x205,
production@qnotescarolinas.com
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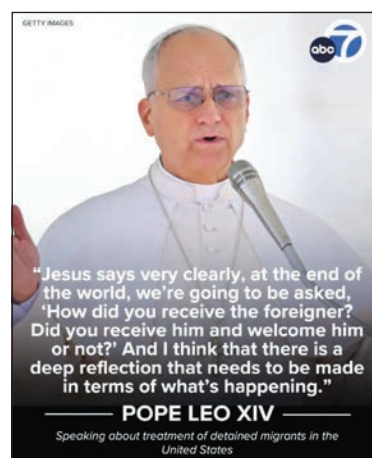


Belmont removes workplace protections

An attorney in Belmont filed a lawsuit in Gaston County on Oct. 30 claiming the town violated NC's open-government laws when the city council removed workplace protections for LGBTQ employees. If the lawsuit is successful the case could require Belmont to restore the protections, and avoid secret policy making.

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Will the recent 'blue wave' be an LGBTQ win?

Are the results a preview of the 2026 midterms?



by Keith Sargent
Contributing Writer

On Nov. 5, Democrats had several significant victories, but what are the major candidate's records on LGBTQ issues?

Zohran Mamdani will be New York City's next mayor.

Mamdani has a history of pro-LGBTQ votes while in office, including supporting New York Proposal 1, which added sexual orientation and gender identity to the state constitution's equal protection clause. He also voted to make the city a sanctuary for LGBTQ+ people.

During his recent campaign, Mamdani carried a transgender flag during the city's Pride march and vowed to protect trans people during his victory speech on Nov. 5.

Abigail Spanberger is the first woman to be elected governor of Virginia.

Spanberger, who was endorsed by the Human Rights Campaign, faced a Republican opponent who claimed opposition to same-sex marriage is not discrimination.

Her website states, "As governor, she will work to safeguard the rights of all Virginians and make sure that no mem-



Zohran Mamdani, New York City's next mayor, has a history of pro-LGBTQ votes while in office.
CREDIT: X/Twitter

ber of the LGBTQ community is denied government services, discriminated against, or loses a job because of who they are. Abigail supports the General Assembly's efforts to remove the ban on marriage equality from Virginia's constitution and enshrine marriage equality in Virginia."

Mikie Sherrill, who won the governorship of New Jersey, supported the Respect for Marriage Act, the LGBTQ+ Data Inclusion Act, and voted against the anti-trans Protection of Women and Girls in Sports Act of 2023 while in Congress.

Garden State Equality said, "Sherrill has been a champion for nondiscrimination protections, gender-affirming care access, and federal funding for LGBTQ+ youth services."

Said Sherrill to Out New Jersey: "We're all worried about our kids, whether they're trans or not, we worry

about their safety, their online experiences, their ability to thrive. Our job as parents, as leaders, as communities, is to protect them and support them. That's what healthy societies do."

Is this recent blue wave a sign of what's to come in the 2026 midterm elections? U.S. House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries posted on X that "Democrats are smoking Donald Trump and Republican extremists throughout the country." Jeffries declared, "The Democratic Party is back."

Historically, the party out of power tends to perform well in the midterms, but the outlook is more complicated this time: In the Senate, Democrats will be



Abigail Spanberger is the first woman to be elected governor of Virginia.
CREDIT: X/Twitter

defending 13 seats in 2026 and will have to flip four Republican ones without losing any of their own to gain control. Most political analysts doubt this is likely.

The situation for Democrats in the House is also tricky. Texas has already redrawn its congressional map to help Republicans gain seats in 2026, while California recently approved changes to its map favoring Democrats. North Carolina gerrymandered its map to gain one more Republican seat and several other states are considering similar moves. ::

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Former New Jersey Congressman Mikie Sherrill, who has a confirmed history of supporting LGBTQ+ rights, will now serve as the state's governor.
CREDIT: Campaign Website

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While no one was watching: Belmont removes LGBTQ employee protections

Karen Hinkley, an attorney in Belmont, filed a lawsuit in Gaston County on Oct. 30 claiming the city of Belmont violated North Carolina's open-government laws when the city council removed workplace protections for LGBTQ employees in March.

The City of Belmont, a suburban community with a population around 15,000, is generally viewed as more politically moderate than the rest of Gaston County, where Donald Trump received about 62% of the vote in 2024.

In June 2020 Belmont added protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity for its employees after a statewide moratorium on local nondiscrimination ordinances was due to expire. Several other cities such as Asheville, Charlotte and

Durham also added protections for LGBTQ residents and employees around this time.



Long a popular entertainment destination and residential spot for the LGBTQ community, did Belmont just roll up the welcome mat?
CREDIT: Facebook

The lawsuit centers on a March 3 vote in which the city council unanimously approved a new personnel policy that no longer includes explicit nondiscrimination protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The Gaston Gazette reported that "[a]fter several unsuccessful public records requests for documentation of behind-the-scenes conversations among City council members, Hinkley filed a lawsuit."

North Carolina's Open Meetings Law states that it "is the public policy of North Carolina that the hearings, deliberations and actions of public bodies be conducted openly."

According to the suit, city officials discussed the policy change outside of public meetings and used private text messages to coordinate the decision, violating North Carolina's Open Meetings Law and Public Records Law. Hinkley argues that these private exchanges and the lack of transparency denied residents their legal right to witness how local policies are made.

The Gazette also reported that Hinkley "spoke about the policy change during public comment at a meeting on April 7. The video recording of that meeting began late and lacked audio for about 30 minutes, she said in the lawsuit, and minutes of the meeting misrepresented her comments. To Hinkley, the paraphrased notes about her comments in the official minutes of that meeting make it sound like she was supporting the removal of the protective language when the opposite is true," she said.

Belmont city officials have not publicly commented on the lawsuit.

If the lawsuit is successful, the case could require Belmont to revisit its decision and restore LGBTQ protections, while also serving as a reminder that local governments must conduct business openly and transparently, and that secret policymaking, even on sensitive issues, can carry legal repercussions. ::

— Keith Sargent

Gay soccer pro Collin Martin faces uncertainty as NCFC shuts down

North Carolina FC, based in the Triangle area, will not field a men's team next season, a decision that has profound personal consequences for midfielder Collin Martin, one of the most visible openly gay athletes in men's professional soccer. Martin told Outsports he is still absorbing the news and what it means for his future. He signed with the club in 2023 in what he described as a meaningful return to North Carolina, bringing him closer to family and back to a state that helped shape his early career.

Martin joined NCFC after four seasons with the San Diego Loyal. In the club's own announcement at the time, he said he was excited to return to North Carolina, where he had previously played college soccer for Wake Forest. He spoke about wanting to be near family again and about the pride he felt in bringing LGBTQ+ visibility to the region's soccer community. "I can't wait to see

what this club achieves in the future and to be a part of something special in North Carolina," he said at the time.

That future has now been cut short. NCFC confirmed it will suspend men's operations following its playoff exit, releasing all players from their contracts as the club shifts its focus to applying for a spot in the USL's planned Division One league, which is not expected to begin play until 2028. The shutdown means Martin will become a free agent while continuing to rehab an ACL injury that has kept him sidelined since July.

Martin appeared 51 times for NCFC across all competitions during his two seasons at WakeMed Soccer Park. Speaking this week, he said the announcement has left him reassessing his next steps. "I'm rehabbing and contemplating next steps," he said. "It's definitely sad and I feel for everyone involved."

The change is a major blow not only

to Martin personally, but also to the fans, staff and players who had built a steady soccer culture in the Triangle over nearly two decades. Some players held multi-year contracts that will now end early, while club staff must look for new positions.

NCFC Chairman Steve Malik says the club hopes to return at a higher competitive level, but that will require substantial new stadium infrastructure and approval from the USL. Malik has reiterated his interest in a downtown Raleigh stadium, though nothing is guaranteed at this stage.

The uncertainty comes at a difficult moment for Martin, who recently turned 31 and had hoped to keep growing both as a player and as one of the few openly gay men in professional soccer. Now a free agent, he says he is focused on recovery and reflection as he considers the next stage of his career. "I hope to continue to be the out player that we need and a shining example of what that visibility means," he said previously. For now, he is sitting with the reality that the North Carolina chapter he was eager to build has ended far earlier than he imagined. ::

— Liz Schob



Collin Martin, one of the few openly gay men in pro soccer, during his tenure with North Carolina FC.
CREDIT: Instagram

City of Charlotte and Center City Partners Celebrate Kickoff of new Rail Trail Bridge

The City of Charlotte, in collaboration with Charlotte Center City Partners and U.S. Bank, celebrated the official kickoff of the RailTrail Bridge Project Oct. 28. The event marked the beginning of construction on a new pedestrian and bicycle bridge that will span I-277, connecting Uptown and South End – both areas extremely popular with the city's LGBTQ+ community – through the Charlotte Rail Trail.

Once complete, the bridge will link the CATS Blue Line Brooklyn Village Station to the existing Rail Trail under the East Morehead Street bridge, creating a seamless route for residents, commuters and visitors to connect between South End and Uptown.

"This is how we build a city that works

for everyone, where people can move safely and comfortably on foot, by bike, or by transit; where walkable streets and connected pathways bring neighbors closer together; and where mobility isn't limited to those with cars, but accessible to all," said Charlotte City Council member and Mayor Pro Tem Dante Anderson.

The \$16.4 million project will include a signature bridge with multiple structural arches, cables and aesthetic lighting, along with upgraded walkways and approach areas on both sides of I-277. The design team includes Schlaich Bergermann Partner, Thomas and Hutton and Depena Studios.

"This bridge will be an important link between our region's primary employment



City Council member for District 1 and Mayor Pro Tem Dante Anderson discusses details of the Rail Trail Bridge.
CREDIT: David Flower, City of Charlotte

and entertainment hubs: Uptown and South End," explained Charlotte Center City Partners CEO Michael Smith. "Closing the gap in the Rail Trail with this iconic architecture will knit together neighborhoods, expand the CBD and enhance hospitality connectivity."

This project is made possible by

multiple funding partners, including the City of Charlotte, U.S. Bank, the North Carolina Department of Transportation, Mecklenburg County, the Charlotte Regional Transportation Planning Organization, ArtPlace America, Asana Partners, Crescent Communities, Portman Holdings and Whole Foods.

"At U.S. Bank, we are heavily invested in the continued growth of Charlotte," said Dee Williams, Executive Vice President and Head of Business Banking for U.S. Bank. "Contributing \$1 million to the new pedestrian bridge was just another reflection of our commitment to the city. We are excited to see this project begin, and we can't wait to see it reach completion and bring together two thriving parts of the city."

The project represents a major step toward improving safe, multimodal connectivity and enhancing the overall experience for those who live, work and enjoy the entertainment scene in Charlotte's Center City District. ::

— Qnotes Staff

Supreme Court declines to revisit landmark same-sex marriage ruling

The U.S. Supreme Court on Monday, Nov. 10, declined to hear a case that could have reopened debate over the constitutional right to same-sex marriage, leaving intact its 2015 decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*.

Without comment, the justices rejected



For now, U.S. same-sex married couples can rest easy.

an appeal from Kim Davis, the former Rowan County, Kentucky clerk who drew national attention a decade ago for refusing to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples following the *Obergefell* ruling. Davis had sought to overturn a lower-court order requiring her to pay more than \$360,000 in damages and attorney's fees to two couples who were denied marriage licenses.

Her appeal, filed by the conservative Liberty Counsel, asked the court to reverse that judgment and reconsider *Obergefell* itself. No justice noted a dissent or issued an opinion as the case was denied in the court's routine order list.

Davis argued that the First Amendment's protection of religious freedom should shield her from civil liability. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit rejected that claim earlier this year, writing that "when an official wields state power against private citizens, her conscience must yield to the Constitution."

The Supreme Court that decided *Obergefell* in 2015 looked very different from today's bench. Justice Anthony Kennedy, the key swing vote who authored the majority opinion, retired in 2018 and was replaced by Justice Brett Kavanaugh. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, a liberal icon in the majority, died in 2020 and was succeeded by Justice Amy Coney Barrett. Three current justices, Chief Justice John Roberts and Justices Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito, dissented in *Obergefell*.

Kennedy's opinion for the court spoke of marriage as an expression of human dignity and love. "No union is more profound than marriage, for it embodies the highest ideals of love, fidelity, devotion, sacrifice and family," Kennedy wrote. "In forming a marital union, two people become something greater than they once were."

In recent weeks, several conservative justices have indicated they were not eager to revisit *Obergefell*. In an interview with The New York Times, Justice Amy Coney Barrett said there are "very concrete reliance interests" tied to same-sex marriage. Justice Samuel Alito, speaking at an event in Washington earlier this fall, criticized the decision in broad terms but acknowledged

that it remains a "precedent of the court that is entitled to the respect afforded by the doctrine of stare decisis."

At the same time, LGBTQ+ advocates have expressed concern about a series of rulings that have narrowed protections for transgender Americans. In recent months, the court allowed states to ban the use of puberty blockers and hormone therapy for trans youth, permitted the Trump administration to bar transgender Americans from serving in the military, and upheld a policy requiring U.S. passports to reflect a person's sex assigned at birth.

Advocates welcomed Monday's order as a reaffirmation of equality under the law. "The Supreme Court made clear today that refusing to respect the constitutional rights of others does not come without consequences," said Kelley Robinson, president of the Human Rights Campaign. "When public officials take an oath to serve their communities, that promise extends to everyone, including LGBTQ+ people."

The Supreme Court's rejection of Davis's appeal leaves the 2015 precedent untouched, ensuring that marriage equality remains the law of the land, at least for now. ::

— Liz Schob

Court strikes down part of Trump's unlawful voting executive order

A District of Columbia federal court issued a decisive ruling Oct. 31, in *League of Women Voters Education Fund v. Trump*, permanently blocking a provision of Trump's March voting executive order that sought to add a requirement to show a passport or similar document proving citizenship when registering to vote with the federal voter registration form that would disproportionately impact voters of color. The decision grants summary judgment to the plaintiffs, finding that the President lacks the authority to unilaterally alter election procedures — powers that rest with Congress and the states.

The ruling makes permanent the

preliminary injunction issued in the case in April, and reaffirms a foundational principle of American democracy: No president can violate the separation of powers to change our elections and erect barriers that disenfranchise eligible voters.

In a joint statement, plaintiffs and counsel, who are a coalition of voting and civil rights organizations, said:

"The court's ruling confirms what we have long argued: the President may not rewrite election law to impose a burdensome show-your-papers rule that would shut out countless Americans from the ballot box. This executive order was an attempted overreach of power, bypass-



The blocked executive order that sought to add a requirement to show a passport or similar document proving citizenship when registering to vote would disproportionately impact voters of color.

ing the Constitution's clear allocation of authority to Congress and the states to set election rules. Our democracy is strongest when every eligible voter can register and vote free from expensive and unnecessary requirements."

This statement comes from The League of Women Voters Education Fund, League of Women Voters of the United States, League of Women Voters of Arizona, Hispanic Federation, NAACP, OCA-Asian Pacific American Advocates, and Asian and Pacific Islander Vote are represented by the American Civil Liberties Union, ACLU of D.C., Asian Americans Advancing Justice — AAJC, Brennan Center for Justice at NYU Law, NAACP Legal Defense Fund and LatinoJustice PRLDEF.

A link to the court's opinion is here: <https://bit.ly/4nXrzb2> and a link to the court's order can be found here: <https://bit.ly/4oKytC0>. ::

— Qnotes Staff

SC gubernatorial candidate Rep. Mace attacks same-sex marriage

South Carolina Rep Nancy Mace (R) made an about-face on her previous support of same-sex marriage by posting "Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve" on her X account on Oct. 28. This comes after defending herself on the platform nearly a year ago by pointing out that she "voted for gay marriage twice." Mace did in fact vote for the Respect for Marriage Act two times in 2022.

Mace has a history of backpedaling on LGBTQ rights. As reported previously in *Qnotes*, Mace's record on LGBTQ+ issues has shifted significantly over the past few years. Once considered a moderate, she supported the Fairness for All Act and voiced support for same-sex marriage. By 2023, however, she had begun openly aligning with anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric. In 2025,

she publicly called herself a "proud transphobe" and introduced legislation targeting transgender access to restrooms on federal property, singling out Delaware State Sen. Sarah McBride by name.

Bathrooms appear to be Mace's cause célèbre. Shortly after targeting McBride, Newsweek reported in Nov. 2024 that she made 326 posts about her bathroom bill during a 72-hour period. In addition, Mace filed an expanded bathroom bill (H.R.10186) that would "Prohibit individuals from accessing or using single-sex facilities on Federal property other than those corresponding to their biological sex, and for other purposes."

Mace has also used the bathroom issue to go after her critics. After conservative Fox News Host Trey Gowdy criticized her on X for not supporting a Trump-backed

spending bill, Mace fired back with a picture of Gowdy and said "Which bathroom do we think Trey Gowdy uses?"

In November 2024 NBC News reported that when challenged by trans and queer activist Evan Greer during a summit at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., "Mace responded by misgendering Greer and making a comment about her genitals, which the crowd booed at."

Mace is seeking to be the Republican nominee for Governor of South Carolina in 2026, and a Winthrop University poll released on Oct. 28 has her essentially tied for first place with current South Carolina Lt. Governor Pamela Evette among likely Republican voters.

Mace has claimed she is "Trump in high heels," but he has yet to endorse a candidate in the South Carolina governor's race, a state where Trump's support is highly valued.

Mace told *Politico*: "He'll get to decide my fate. He is a kingmaker, and I hope in this case he will be a queenmaker." ::

— Keith Sargent



Hoping for an endorsement: SC candidate for governor Nancy Mace referred to Donald Trump as a 'queenmaker.'

PHOTO CREDIT: Wikipedia Commons

Trans service members sue admin over revoked retirement benefits

Seventeen transgender members of the U.S. Air Force and Space Force have filed a federal lawsuit against the Trump administration, saying the government unlawfully revoked their hard-earned retirements and stripped them of pensions and health care benefits that had already been approved.

The plaintiffs, each with more than 15 years of active-duty service, argue that the Air Force violated its own retirement rules when it canceled retirement orders issued in June 2025. Those orders were rescinded in August after the administration reinstated a ban on transgender military service.

Losing retirement status for these service members is not a minor paperwork change. It means the loss of up to one to two million dollars in lifetime pension benefits, along with the loss of health coverage that military fami-

lies rely on for long-term stability and care.

Master Sergeant Logan Ireland, who served 15 years in the Air Force including a deployment to Afghanistan, said the reversal has left families facing profound uncertainty. "Ripping away the retirements we have earned is a betrayal of the sacrifices made by servicemembers and our families," Ireland said. "We should not be thrown into economic hardship or made to feel our years of service are regarded by our country as meaningless."

The rescissions stem from a February 2025 Defense Department directive that ordered the removal of all transgender service members unless they received a case-by-case waiver. Under the policy, anyone diagnosed with or showing signs of gender dysphoria is barred from continued service. Some of the

plaintiffs in the lawsuit had already begun planning life after active duty when their retirements were abruptly canceled.

Legal advocates say the Air Force's actions break long-standing norms about how the military treats those who have served honorably. "This is a senseless and shocking affront to troops who have sacrificed so much for our country," said Michael Haley, staff attorney at GLAD Law. "These brave transgender servicemembers deserve the retirement benefits they have earned and that the Air Force granted them. As a country, we must honor our word to them, not rip away their benefits."

Shannon Minter, legal director of the National Center for LGBTQ Rights, said rescinding these retirements underscores the severity of the administration's policy. "There has never been an administration that has shown such open hostility to the brave men and women who have served our country," Minter said.

For Ireland and the other plaintiffs, standing up in court is simply an extension



Master Sergeant Logan Ireland, a 15-year Air Force veteran, is among 17 transgender service members challenging the rescission of their approved retirements.
CREDIT: Facebook

of their service. I'm not gonna go down without trying to fight at every angle that I can," Ireland said. "And if that's through the court system, then that is where my fight is. That is my new battleground." ::

— Liz Schob

People magazine names gay actor Jonathan Bailey Sexiest Man Alive

People Magazine has named gay British actor Jonathan Bailey its Sexiest Man Alive for 2025. He joins the ranks of other celebrities such as George Clooney, Chris Evans and Paul Rudd, who have also received the title.

"Obviously, I'm incredibly flattered. And it's completely absurd," Bailey told *People* with a laugh.

Bailey, 37 became known to many American audiences through his role as the dashing Viscount Anthony Bridgerton in the hit Netflix Regency romance series "Bridgerton," and as a gay man navigating a secret love affair during the McCarthy era in Showtime's political thriller "Fellow Travelers."

Bailey's varied career spans theatre, television and film. He started out as a child actor in England after joining the

Royal Shakespeare Company at age seven, and has since appeared in major stage productions including *Les Misérables*, *Othello* and *Company*. His performance in *Company* earned him a Laurence Olivier award in 2019.

The actor also appeared in the 2025 American film "Jurassic World: Rebirth" and Brit TV series such as "Broadchurch" and "Crashing," but his role as the idealistic and closeted assistant to Senator Joe McCarthy in "Fellow Travelers" is likely the one that resonates most with LGBTQ+ viewers. The series also stars gay actor Matt Bomer and received mostly positive reviews for its portrayal of two gay men dealing with secrecy, fear and internal conflict in the ultra-conservative 1950s. Bomer and Bailey were both nominated



People's Sexiest Man Alive 2025: British actor Jonathan Bailey
CREDIT: Publicity Image

for Emmys for their performances.

Bailey is very active in LGBTQ+ political and philanthropic causes, and he started a charity called the Shameless Fund in 2024.

In September he told *Time* magazine "I just felt so strongly about the elder members of the community, many of whom are much more likely to be single, less likely to have children, and they're going into care homes and [dealing with] homophobia. Having to go back in the closet. The first five grants we've given, two are going to charities that look after elderly LGBTQ+ members. We have to look after them because they fought so hard."

On its website the Shameless Fund says "Around the world, anti-LGBTQ+ laws are on the rise. We're raising funds through global brand partnerships to support international, national and grassroots nonprofits, with the goal of creating a world where every LGBTQ+ person can live authentically, love freely and thrive without discrimination, oppression or shame." ::

— Keith Sargent

Michael Willis Heard, creator behind viral "Yes King" audio, dead at 53



Heard built a large following through motivational content, adult videos and viral clips including the widely used "Yes King" audio.
CREDIT: Facebook

Michael Willis Heard, the adult content creator, counselor, former preacher and online personality known widely as Love and Light TV, has died at age 53, according to public posts from family members, friends and colleagues. Heard built a large digital following across platforms through motivational content, adult videos, and viral audio clips, including the popular "Yes King" sound that became a staple of TikTok and social media remixes. His death was first shared publicly in tributes posted by loved ones.

Bishop Stephen L. Write of Victory Nation Ministries wrote about Heard's passing in a Facebook post on Sunday. "My beloved son (spiritual son) has transitioned from Earth to eternity," he wrote. "Michael Willis Heard treated and respected me like his literal father and I loved him just as if I'd birthed him."

Heard's daughter, Mykel Crumbie, also

confirmed his death on Facebook, sharing photos of her father and expressing grief over the reactions some people had to his work and identity. "This was the greatest man to live on this earth," she wrote. "The love and compassion he had is unmatched. My dad came to everyone with LOVE and touch[ed] soooo many lives!"

Born in 1972, Heard identified as pan-sexual and polyamorous and came from a career rooted in ministry, counseling and spiritual support before moving into online content creation. Friends and colleagues described him as someone who believed in emotional honesty, connection and personal freedom. On YouTube, TikTok, and other platforms, his account Love and Light TV mixed motivational messages, humor and adult content, and his expressive delivery became a recognizable hallmark.

Heard's adult videos often went viral because of his vocal style, generating several widely used audio clips. The most notable was "Yes King," a TikTok staple used in comedic edits, empowerment videos and pop-culture mashups. His influence extended beyond social media. Heard appeared in the 2025 film *Pastor*, directed by Raquel M.

R. Thomas, playing Jacob Love. The film is available on Tubi and Amazon Prime.

Tributes also came from within the adult entertainment community. Performer Max Konnor wrote that Heard had "got his wings" and described him as someone whose joy and kindness left lasting impressions. "He truly was too good for this world and the light and joy he brought to everyone who knew him shines still," Konnor wrote.

Friends have organized a GoFundMe to support Heard's loved ones, though organizers emphasized that the family did not request the fundraiser. Proceeds are intended for Heard's daughter and close collaborators. While friends have circulated reports that he died following an asthma attack that led to a heart attack and subsequent brain death, his family has not released an official cause of death.

As news of his death continues to circulate, thousands of social media users have shared memories of Heard's videos, affirmations and humor, remembering him as someone who encouraged people to embrace authenticity and self-acceptance. ::

— Liz Schob

The queer guide to gift giving: 2025 edition

List offers a huge variety of holiday gifts for everyone

by Mikey Rox | Contributing Writer

Some gifts scream practical, others whisper luxury, and a few flat-out blur the lines. From cocoa that feels ceremonial to a cologne that lingers like a suggestive smirk, this year's ultimate gift picks prove that thoughtful (and occasionally naughty) presents don't have to be prosaic. Welcome to your holiday cheat sheet for festive tangibles that get noticed, remembered, and maybe even result in a peck of gratitude planted under the mistletoe.

Woo(e)d Cologne



British GQ recently crowned Woo(e)d by ALTAIA the "Best Date Night Fragrance," and honestly, they nailed it. Confident without being cocky – smoky gaiac and Atlas cedarwood grounds the room while supple leather and spicy cardamom do all the flirting – it's a scent that lingers like good conversation and soft candlelight. Gift it to the one who always turns heads – or keep it for yourself and let them come to you. \$255, [BeautyHabit.com](#)

Shacklelock Necklace



Turn the industrial-chic vibe of a shackle into a sleek statement. Mi Tesoro's platinum-plated stainless-steel necklace sits on an 18-inch wheat chain, featuring a shackle-style latch pendant that's waterproof, tarnish-free, and totally fuss-less. Beyond style, it nods to a classic gesture in the queer leather community: replacing a traditional Master lock with something elegant to quietly signal belonging to someone special. Wear it solo for a minimalist edge or layer it like you mean it; either way this piece locks in both your look and your intentions. \$90, [MiTesoroJewelry.com](#)

Villeroy & Boch Royal Classic Christmas Collection



Every meal is a mini celebration – with whimsy at every place setting – in Villeroy & Boch's Royal Classic festive dinnerware collection that hits all the right notes. Made from premium German porcelain, it features nostalgic little toys, nutcrackers and rocking horses in delicate relief, giving your holiday spread a playful but refined twist. Dishwasher and microwave-safe, it's luxe without the fuss. Gift a piece to a special someone, or start a collection they'll use (and show off) for years to come. \$22-\$363, [Villeroy-Boch.com](#)

Wickless Vulva Candles



Bold, luxurious and completely flame-free, CTOAN's wickless candles melt from beneath on top of a warmer, releasing subtle, sophisticated fragrances like sandalwood or lavender. The vulva-shaped wax adds a playful, provocative element to any space – perfect for a bedroom, living room or anywhere you want elegance with a muffy edge. A gift that celebrates form, intimacy and self-expression, no fire required. \$39, [CTOANCO.com](#)

Disaster Playbook by Here Comes the Apocalypse



Because the end of the world shouldn't be a solo act, this spiral-bound guide is

your step-by-step roadmap to surviving and thriving when everything else goes sideways – which might be sooner than you think. Packed with checklists, drills and a healthy dose of humor, it's like a survival manual written by your most prepared (and slightly snarky) friend. Whether you're prepping for a zombie apocalypse or a revolution, this playbook's got your back. \$40, [HereComesTheApocalypse.com](#)

Amber Glass Champagne Flutes



Pop the champs – but make it vintage. These tulip-shaped stunners in amber-tinted glass bring all the Gatsby vibes without the jazz-age drama. Whether you're toasting a milestone or celebrating a Tuesday, their seven-ounce capacities and hand-wash-only care make 'em as practical as they are pretty. Pair with a thoughtful bottle of bubs and gift with a glittering wink. \$18, [NantucketLooms.com](#)

Manta Sleep Mask



Total blackout, zero pressure on the eyes, and Bluetooth speakers built right into the straps, this ain't your mama's sleep mask – but it could be. The Manta SOUND sleep mask features C-shaped eye cups that block every hint of light while ultra-thin speakers deliver your favorite white noise, meditation, or late-night playlist straight to your ears. With 24-hour battery life, breathable fabric, and easy-to-adjust sound, it turns any bed (or airplane seat) into a five-star sleep suite. Perfect for anyone who treats shut-eye like an art form (or just wants to escape their roommate's late-night bingin' and/or bannin'). \$159, [MantaSleep.com](#)

Greenworks Electric Lawnmower



You a 'hood queen who considers lawn care performance art – or just wants to rule the cul-de-sac in quiet, emission-free glory? Greenworks' zero-turn electric mower has the muscle of a 24-horsepower gas engine but none of the fumes, drama or maintenance. Six 60V batteries and a 42-inch deck mean you can mow up to two-and-a-half acres on a single charge – then plug in, recharge and ride again. It's whisper-quiet, slope-ready and smooth enough to make you wonder why you ever pushed anything besides your queer agenda. The perfect gift for the homeowner who loves sustainability, symmetry and showing off their freshly striped yard like that fresh fade you get on Fridays. \$5,000, [GreenworksTools.com](#)

Parkside Flask Mojave Edition



Wine nights get a desert glow-up with Parkside's limited-edition 750-milliliter all-in-one flask draped in sun-washed bronze and badland hues like sage, sand and terracotta – with magnetic stemless tumblers that snap on for effortless shareability. It keeps your vino chilled for 24 hours, pours without drips (no tears for spilled rosé, please), and even lets you laser-engrave your own mantra or inside joke. Perfect for picnics, surprise rooftop clinks or gifting to your favorite wine (or desert) rat. \$149, [HighCampFlasks.com](#) ::

Mikey Rox is an award-winning journalist and LGBT lifestyle expert whose work has been published in more than 100 outlets across the world. Connect with him on Instagram @mikeyroxtravels

Strawberry shortcake

Tasty Holiday Treats

by L'Monique King | Qnotes Staff Writer

No meal or holiday dinner would be complete without a sweet ending. This recipe is offered up by Leslie "Mouse" Bound, founder of Beyond Blessed Catering. Bond is a drummer, life partner, parent and culinary artist who whips up dishes that are tasty and healthy. In her stylized and empowering manner,

this simple strawberry shortcake dessert will be included in Chef Bond's upcoming children's cookbook. So, when you're planning for delectables this holiday season, remember all the dishes don't have to fall on mommy or Uncle Jimmy. Little ones can join in the preparation along with the delight of devouring their own creation. ::

STRAWBERRY SHORTCAKE

PREP TIME: 15 MINUTES / COOK TIME: 0 MINUTES / SERVINGS: 1

INGREDIENTS

- 1 Ice cream biscuit
- 1/2 cup sliced strawberries
- 2 Tsp Granulated Sugar
- 1/2 Tsp Vanilla Extract
- 1/2 cup whipped topping of choice

DIRECTIONS

1. In a mixing bowl combine strawberry slices, sugar, vanilla and set aside until strawberries create a sauce and sugar dissolves
2. Split biscuit in half and pour strawberries over.
3. Top with whipped cream.
4. Grab a spoon and enjoy

NOTE:
Many types of berries can be used in this recipe

by Chef L.A. Bond



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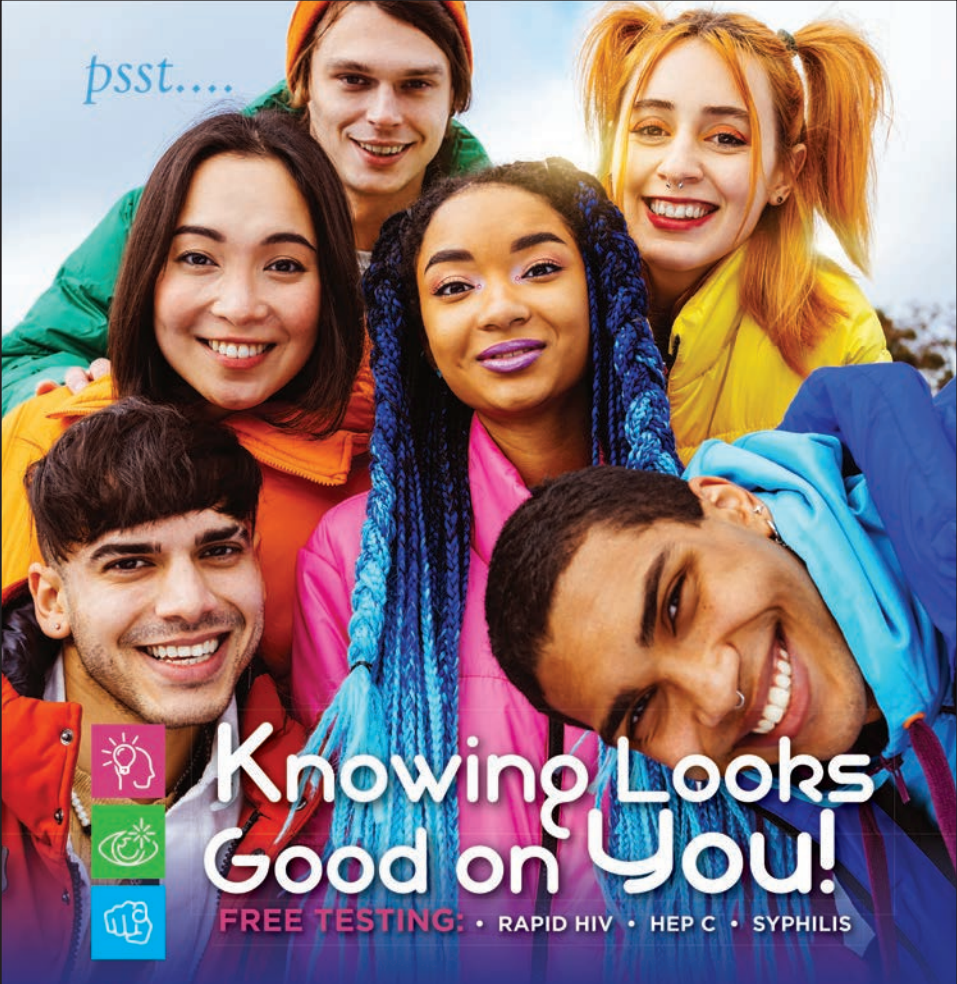
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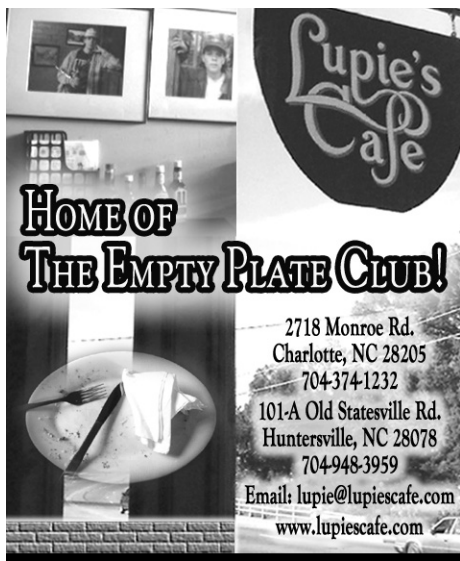
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'Queer Enlightenments: A Hidden History of Lovers, Lawbreakers, and Homemakers'

Out in Print



by Terri Schlichenmeyer
Contributing Writer

"Queer Enlightenments: A Hidden History of Lovers, Lawbreakers, and Homemakers"

by Anthony Delaney
©2025, Atlantic Monthly Press
\$30.00
352 pages

It had to start somewhere. The discrimination, the persecution, the inequality, it had a launching point. Can you put your finger on that date? Was it DADT, the 1950s scare, the Kinsey report? Certainly not Stonewall, or the Marriage Act, so where did it come from? In **"Queer Enlightenments: A Hidden History of Lovers, Lawbreakers, and Homemakers"** by Anthony Delaney, the story of queer oppression goes back so much further...

The first recorded instance of the word "homosexual" arrived loudly in the spring of 1868: Hungarian journalist Károly Mária Kerthbeny wrote a letter to German activist

Karl Heinrich Ulrichs referring to "same-sex attracted men" with that new term. Many people believe that this was the "invention" of homosexuality, but Delaney begs to differ.

"Queer histories run much deeper than this..." he says.

Take, for instance, the delightfully-named Mrs. Clap, who ran a "House" in London in which men often met other men for "marriage." On a February night in 1726, Mrs. Clap's House was raided and forty men were taken to jail, where they were put in filthy, dank confines until the courts could get to them. One of the men was ultimately hanged for the crime of sodomy. Mrs. Clap was pilloried, and then disappeared from history.

William Pulteney had a duel with John, Lord Hervey, over insults flung at the latter man. The truth: Hervey was, in fact, openly a "sodomite." He and his companion, Ste Fox had even set up a home together.

Adopting your lover was common in eighteenth century London, in order to make him a legal heir. In about 1769, rumors spread that the lovely female spy, the Chevalier d'Éon, was actually Charles d'Éon de Beaumont, a man who had been dressing in feminine attire for much longer than his espionage career. Anne Lister's masculine demeanor often left her an "outcast." And as George Wilson brought his bride to North America in 1821, he confessed to loving men, thus becoming North America's first official "female husband."

Sometimes, history can be quite dry. So can author Anthony Delaney's wit. Together, though, they work well inside "Queer Enlightenments."

Undoubtedly, you well know that inequality and persecution aren't new things - which Delaney underscores here - and queer ancestors faced them head-on, just as people do today. The twist, in this often-chilling narrative, is that punishments levied on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century queer folk was harsher and Delaney doesn't soften those accounts for readers. Read this book, and you're platform-side at a hanging, in jail with an ally, at a duel with a complicated basis, embedded in a King's court, and on a ship with a man whose new wife generously ignored his secret. Most of these tales are set in Great Britain and Europe, but North America features some,



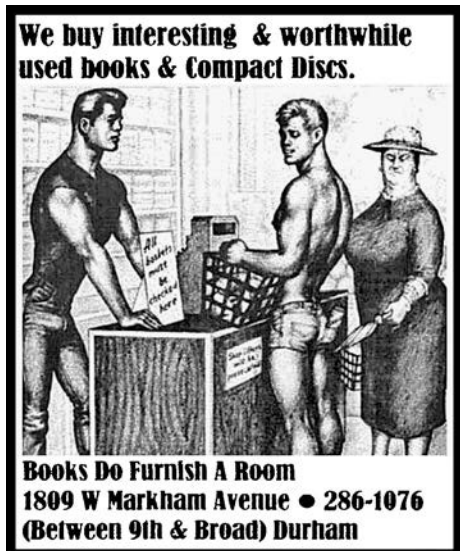
and Delaney wraps up things nicely for today's relevance.

While there's some amusing side-eyeing in this book, "Queer Enlightenments" is a bit on the heavy side, so give yourself time with it. Pick it up, though, and you'll love it til the end. ::



Author Anthony Delaney.
CREDIT: Photography by Pip

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Our world is different today than it was this time last year. Changes in the government and healthcare have left many of us concerned about the future. At the same time, new meds and methods of treatment allow us easier access, a better quality of existence and all the more reason to live your **life, *positively*** more than ever before.

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PEP or PrEP? HIV and STI prevention and intervention

Check out these options for healthy sexual activity



by L'Monique King
Qnotes Staff Writer

It's that time of year when the weather is colder and folks are looking to be snuggled up with a significant other. That said, the Southeast is a part of our nation where HIV & STI rates are disproportionately high. For this reason and many others, it's important that we arm ourselves with information that can increase our intimate experiences while keeping us safe and protected from viruses and illness no one should have to suffer.

With medical advances being made in leaps and bounds, community members now have many choices in HIV intervention and prevention.

Let's start with **HIV PEP** (Post-Exposure Prophylaxis); a treatment regimen used to prevent HIV infection after a potential exposure to the virus. **PEP** is designed to reduce

the risk of HIV infection by inhibiting the replication of the virus in the body. Medications vary but all are designed to ward off HIV infection in the event of exposure due to sexual contact or tainted needle contact. Initially, **PEP** was offered and more accessible to those who had experienced (and reported in less than 72 hours) a sexual assault with someone of unknown HIV status or health care providers exposed to accidental needle sticks. Today, **PEP** is more accessible and can be attained via an area health client or conversation with a health care practitioner. Again, there is a 72-hour window for effectiveness, so if you've experienced either risk factor, move quickly.

Doxy PEP (Doxycycline Post-Exposure Prophylaxis) is sometimes referred to as The Morning After Pill for STIs.

For greater clarity and professional insight, *Qnotes* reached out to local health care provider PA and NC Department of Health and Human Services **PrEP** Consultant J. Wesley Thompson, also known as one of the co-founders of Amity Medical Group.

"There has been a tremendous uptake," Thompson offered. "Patients are coming in for **Doxy PEP** in advance of having sexual encounters. Within three days [of an encounter] you take two pills one time. However, testing is still recommended within 30 days of exposure."

Doxy PEP is effective at preventing Chlamydia and Syphilis, and is moderately effective against Gonorrhea in specific populations, primarily gay and bisexual men and transgender women who have had an STI in the last 12 months. Other populations have either not yet been studied enough to prove the drug's effectiveness or (as is the case with cisgender heterosexual women) the population hasn't shown medications to be beneficial. Most recent data shows **Doxy PEP** to be 33 – 90 percent effective. Effectiveness rates from various studies generally show: a 70 – 90 percent effectiveness for Chlamydia, up to 80 percent effective for Syphilis and only 33 to 60 percent effective for Gonorrhea.

Although covered in depth by *Qnotes*

HOW TO TAKE DOXY PEP

Dosing Chart

- 200 mg of doxycycline taken within 24 hours (ideal), but no later than 72 hours (acceptable) after anal, oral, or vaginal sex.**
- Doxy PEP can be taken every day, but not more than once a day (200mg per day maximum).**

Example

SEX ON SATURDAY:

Ideal: Take doxy PEP on Sunday

Acceptable: Take doxy PEP no later than Tuesday

Doxy PEP is sometimes referred to as the 'Morning After' pill for STIs.

CREDIT: CDC

PrEP vs PEP

PrEP	PEP
PrEP stands for Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis.	PEP stands for Post-Exposure Prophylaxis.
It means taking antiretroviral medicines (ART) before being potentially exposed to HIV to prevent becoming infected.	It means taking antiretroviral medicines (ART) after being potentially exposed to HIV to prevent becoming infected.

reporter Wendy Lyons, we thought it important to share a few extra details on prevention, known as **PrEP** (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) in this article.

"I presented **PrEP** to the Pitt County Health Department (Greenville, N.C.)," Thompson recalled. "They were very motivated. Within one month of my presentation, they had 80 new **PrEP** clients; which goes to prove that when people have the knowledge they need, they are more apt to take better care of themselves."

It's important to note, **PrEP** is for people who don't have HIV, but are at risk of getting HIV from sex or injection drug use. You should be tested for HIV in advance of a **PrEP** injection or prescription with retesting done about every three months to ensure a nonreactive/negative HIV status.

In the meantime, if you're not already using **PrEP**, use condoms and/or other barriers to stave off HIV and STIs. "Many people feel as though condoms (though only half a millimeter thick) impedes the intimacy we were

intended to share between consenting adults. Many people don't want that barrier. That's why **HIV PrEP**, **PEP** and **Doxy PEP** are so important, so you can have sex naturally and enjoyably with minimal risk." With that said, most clinicians still recommend using condoms. The prevention rates are not 100%. Some are known as low as only 33% effective. ::

It's important to note, PrEP is for people who don't have HIV, but are at risk.

The impact of federal laws & government shutdowns on AIDS service organizations

Without federal funding, could we see a return to the AIDS pandemic of the late 20th century?



by David Aaron Moore
Qnotes Staff Writer

The actions of the current administration through presidential orders, federal legislation and the recent government shutdown, has affected us all. The world around us has changed in so many ways since Trump reclaimed the oval office, it is practically unfathomable.

So we're going to focus on one area: non-profit HIV/AIDS service organizations.

Here's a look at what's been impacted:

Research Grants: The National Institutes of Health (NIH) terminated dozens of HIV research grants, including an \$18 million per year program for adolescents and young adults and a \$2 million grant for an HIV research facility

DEI-linked Funding: The cuts were largely linked to the administration's efforts to eliminate funding with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) components, which disproportionately impacted HIV programs because the disease affects minority popu-

lations at a higher rate.

CDC Prevention Cuts: The administration's proposed budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 called for the elimination of all federal funding for HIV prevention at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a cut of nearly \$800 million.

Service Providers: Local ASOs that rely on federal funding for HIV testing, prevention (including PrEP access), and outreach services reported immediate difficulties with some programs having to reduce or halt services.

Advocacy groups and health experts have warned that these cuts could reverse decades of progress in fighting the epidemic and lead to an increase in new infections and AIDS-related deaths.

Ultimately, what does that mean for people who are HIV positive, if they cannot get their medication? Viral loads will start to creep back up. More individuals will get sick and some will die.

"Yes, that is a possibility," says **Ra'Shawn Flournoy**, the Executive Director of **Quality Comprehensive Health Care**, which provides healthcare, and more, aimed at the area's Black LGBTQ+ Community. "I think that we're heading in that direction if we



Quality Executive Director Ra'Shawn Flournoy.
CREDIT: Facebook

don't make some shifts really quickly."

Quality receives much of their funding through providers such as SAMHSA, CDC and HRSA. What their plans are for the future are uncertain. Clearly, services currently available will change even more if additional funds are discontinued.

"We're being greatly impacted by the

funds that are being withheld," Flournoy continues. "Our STI grant was cut and because of the DEI mandate with Trump, the administration had actually even called us and said because we had language that had DEI in it, we had 48 hours to change it before we lost all of our funding."

Flournoy believes there are two ways towards ending the struggle and making the changes that will keep our community from dissipating.

"I think that one of the best ways to make that happen is that folks need to wake up and understand that you know your voice matters. You have to get out there and vote. We cannot allow this same type of situation to take place again. Let [politicians] know how you really feel, and then let them know that if they won't make changes, you will."

In addition to changing the ways the government is treating the in-need LGBTQ+ population, Flournoy has some thoughts about how community members can keep organizations like Quality available and able to serve those in need.

"I think volunteering time, you know, sometimes just helping with greeting folks, working at the front desk, or something like

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Powerhouse 2.0 Director Craymon Garner.
CREDIT: Facebook

that at the office makes a huge difference. With healthcare, especially if you're a retired nurse or a provider, they can be able to provide a lot of help. We do not want to turn anyone away, and we're going to do whatever it takes to make sure we stay open and our clients are getting the services they need."

Chelsea Gulden, the executive director at **RAIN**, confirms there have been challenges unexpected from the government shutdown and there are many anticipated issues expected in the near future as a result of Trump and administration directives.

"We are not receiving our reimbursements," she explains. "The thing is, with all of the cuts that are set to go into effect – and many are still being challenged – like if the CDC really shuts down their HIV division as a whole and moves to this new 'Office of Healthy Americans' they're creating – that's all domestic HIV testing nationally. It's all of our disease tracking. All of that is supposed to be uprooted and put into a whole new government branch. Our state laws ... are based on CDC guidelines. So if those guidelines no longer exist, it disrupts a whole system of care."

Gulden pauses for a moment as she thinks about a RAIN client. "There's one case that I was looking at today with an individual who has had the same plan year after year after year, it's one person, a non-smoker and they've made about \$50,000 every single year. Their income has not changed. Their premiums in 2023 were about \$780, in 2024 they were about \$840, and this year they're \$1562 a month, and that plan is through the Affordable Care Act."

"So if you think about the loss of access to health care we're going to be facing for not only people living with HIV, but also those who are on PrEP, we are poised to see numbers of HIV increase in a way we have not seen in years. When, on the flip side, just last year, we had the ability to literally see the end of HIV in sight. And now we're faced with the loss of all CDC money, potentially a huge cut to Ryan White, a huge cut to HOPWA, (the housing program for people living with HIV) and increased cost of healthcare. When people can't afford healthcare, how are they supposed to go to the doctor?"

When asked about what RAIN might do about a massive funding loss and ways they might work towards conquering that challenge, her response shows signs of worry and concern, but not defeat.

"The truth of the matter is, there are so many things that are poised to be cut or eliminated that I couldn't realistically come up with a plan for each scenario. So I think one thing that we're looking at doing is really trying to engage with more individual donors and really get the word out that HIV is still a problem and can potentially

become a much larger problem."

At **Powerhouse 2.0**, a part of Quality that serves as a drop-in center for economically-challenged HIV-positive clients to gain access to some of life's regular needs, Director **Craymon Garner** talks about what they currently offer, and what they may end up losing.

"You're able to come in, get some food and rest. We have resources for you. We have computers if you need to check emails and want to help apply for jobs and testing. That's what we offer here. So that would all go away if the CDC goes away."

Garner has also worked with a client who has experienced challenges, in this case with access to medication and food.

"I had a client that could not get his medication," Garner recalls. "I don't know what the reason was, but we came up with a full payment for him to get what he needed. And this client is on Medicaid and Medicare, and they had never experienced this issue before. So we were eventually able to find a resource to pay for it, but it was something that scared me, because this is the calm before the storm. This is really what we're about to deal with, but on a much larger scale. He's HIV positive. That means his levels are going to increase,



RAIN Executive Director Chelsea Gulden.
CREDIT: Facebook

his lab values are going to CD four, all that's going to be impacted. What's it going to be like when a lot of clients are faced with this?"

Despite Garner's success with helping this client, he doesn't have a resolution yet for the issue when the numbers start to climb.

But that doesn't stop him, he continues to tackle problems for ASO clients facing varying issues, including conquering food insecurity, which many ASOs offer help with.

While the federal SNAP program was shut down with the rest of the government recently, it rarely provides adequate funding to cover nutritional expenses for an entire month.

"I've been hit every day this week with multiple phone calls like, 'I need food. I need food. I don't have my food stamps.' So for me, I take the initiative to do the referral, and then I'll go and pick it up myself and take it to their home, because a lot of the food banks around here in Charlotte are low on drivers. Even if you put in a full referral today, you may not be able to get it till next Thursday."

On that same topic, especially as we move towards the holidays, Garner offers a way the Charlotte LGBTQ+ community can help tackle the challenge for the organization's clients without access to adequate nutrition.

"I think if we all pull together, go in our pantries and look at what we're not eating, we can provide for others. It doesn't have to be a turkey and dressing with all the fixings, but let's give them something to get them through the holidays or at least, get them through the week." ::

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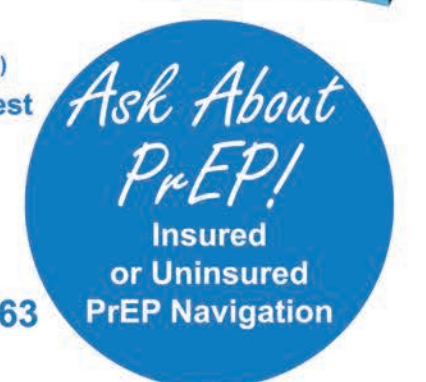
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HIV/AIDS service organizations

The Carolinas has a variety of community organizations, resources and services for those living with HIV/AIDS or those seeking to get involved in HIV/AIDS prevention, education and advocacy.

NORTH CAROLINA

ASHEVILLE

Western North Carolina AIDS Project

554 Fairview Rd., Asheville, NC 28803
828-252-7489
wncap.org.

WNCAP provides case management, prevention and education programs, outreach, HIV testing and other services throughout Western North Carolina. In addition to its main office in Asheville, the group also has offices and a presence in Franklin and Shelby.

CHARLOTTE

Amity Medical Group

East Charlotte
6010 E. W.T. Harris Blvd.
Charlotte, NC 28215
704-208-4134
9835 Monroe Rd Ste B,
Charlotte, NC 28270
704-208-4134
10508 Park Rd #130
Charlotte, NC 28210
(704) 461-0006
amitymed.org.

Amity Medical Group provides full-service, primary care medical treatment, as well as HIV/AIDS managed care under the direction of Dr. Richard Wynn and J. Wesley Thompson, MHS, PA-C, AAHIVS, DFAAPA. The practice also has an onsite pharmacy operating under the umbrella of Rx Clinic Pharmacy with Olivia Bentley, PharmD, CFTs, AAHIVP as the director of clinical pharmacy services, provides free/confidential HIV testing, case management and prescribes HIV/AIDS medications. Its offices are open to the community as a part of a collaborative effort to provide care and access to agencies and services outside its doors.

Carolinas CARE Partnership

5855 Executive Center Dr., Suite 200,
Charlotte, NC 28212
704-531-2467
carolinascare.org.

Carolinas CARE Partnership provides free HIV/STD testing and counseling, mobile testing unit, housing assistance, peer training, case management and other services, prevention and education.

Dudley's Place

107 Commerce Centre Drive, Suite 202
Huntersville, NC 28078
704-977-2972
myrosedalehealth.com/dudley.

Dudley's Place is an HIV non-profit housed at Rosedale Health and Wellness. The mission is to enhance the overall care of Rosedale's HIV population. Offering a wide range of services including mental health counseling, nutrition counseling, food and toiletries assistance, support groups, peer navigation, community education, free testing and transportation services.

House of Mercy

P.O. Box 808 (100 McAuley Cir.), Belmont,
NC 28012
704-825-4711 (administration)
704-825-3000 (residence)
thehouseofmercy.org.

House of Mercy provides housing and compassionate care for persons living with AIDS. In addition to room and board, House of Mercy coordinates medical care and therapies plus a variety of supplemental services to enhance the physical, emotional and spiritual lives of its residents.

Mecklenburg County Department of Health

249 Billingsley Rd., Charlotte, NC 28211
704-336-4700/704-432-TEST (8378)
bit.ly/2FpddQK.

Provides testing, case management, awareness, education and other services at various locations, events and times throughout the county and year.

The PowerHouse 2 Next Generation

3552 Beatties Ford Rd., Charlotte, NC 28270
980-228-3008
facebook.com/ThePowerhouseProject/.

PowerHouse 2 is a drop-in center and safe space for Black and Latino gay or bisexual men or men who have sex with men. The group offers a computer lab, weekly empowerment programs and workshops, retreats for men over 25 years old, social events, monthly discussion groups for men 18-29 years old and free and confidential HIV testing, which is always available during hours of operation. The PowerHouse Project is a program of Quality Home Care Services.

Quality Home Care Services

2202 Beatties Ford Rd., Charlotte, NC 28207
980-819-8063
qhcsnc.org.

Quality Home Care Services provides a variety of services for those living with HIV including case management, HIV/AIDS prevention programs and testing, substance abuse treatment, community-based rehabilitation services for those with mental development disabilities and other services.

RAIN

601 E. 5th Street, Suite 470, Charlotte, NC
28202
704-372-7246
carolinarain.org.

RAIN engages the community to transform lives and promote respect and dignity for all people touched by HIV through compassionate care, education and leadership development. Services include CARE Management, Peer2Peer support and outreach, support groups for youth, faith-based training, chaplain services and caring volunteers who provide practical support to persons living with HIV and AIDS. RAIN also provides HIV awareness and prevention education programs to thousands of people each year and is the only HIV non-profit in the Charlotte metropolitan area providing direct client services.

RAO Community Health

321 W. 11th St., Charlotte, NC 28202
704-237-8793
raoassist.org.

RAO Community Health is a non-

profit committed to providing awareness, support, and services for those living with HIV/AIDS and other health disparities; along with providing prevention and education for those looking to protect their sexual health. Some of the services and programs include: PrEP program, support group for those living with HIV, and educational training for volunteers. RAO also provides housing assistance and toiletry pantry services for those in need with HIV.

Rosedale Health and Wellness

103 Commerce Centre Drive, Suite 103
Huntersville, NC 28078
(704) 237-8793
myrosedalehealth.com.

Rosedale Health and Wellness is a full-service HIV/infectious diseases clinic that offers a variety of medical services. Staff, under the direction of Dr. Frederick Cruickshank, work closely with medical case management organizations and engage in clinical trials, among other services. It houses a Walgreen's Specialty Pharmacy to support the needs of its clients and patients.

EASTERN

PiCASO

(Pitt County AIDS Service Organization)

3219 Landmark St. Suite 9A, Greenville NC,
27834
252-830-1660
picaso.org.

Starting as a grassroots organization focused on supporting those living with HIV/AIDS, providing buddy programs, nutritional support and healthcare advocacy, the agency changed over the years to a case-management-focused agency working with long-term client support. Currently, the group provides HIV testing, education and advocacy and emergency funding for those living with HIV/AIDS.

TRIAD

Positive Wellness Alliance

400 E. Center St., Lexington, NC 27292
336-248-4646
704 Brooktown Ave.,
Winston-Salem, NC 27101
336-722-0976
positivewellnessalliance.org.

Positive Wellness Alliance is a community-based organization that provides medical case management, financial assistance, life skills management classes, support groups and housing assistance. It serves Davidson, Davie, Forsyth, Iredell, Rowan, Stokes, Surry and Yadkin Counties.

Triad Health Project

801 Summit Ave., Greensboro, NC 27405
336-275-1654
501 W. Westwood Ave., High Point, NC
27262
336-884-4116
triadhealthproject.org.

Triad Health Project provides case management and other client support services, HIV testing and prevention outreach, medical, social service and legal referrals,

food pantry and nutritional resources and education, support groups and education, art and exercise programs.

TRIANGLE

Alliance of AIDS Services – Carolina

3109 Poplar Wood Court Suite 200, Raleigh,
NC 27604
919-834-2437
aas-c.org.

Alliance of AIDS Services-Carolina provides case management, HIV/STD testing and counseling, emergency assistance for rent and utilities, transportation assistance, housing information and referrals, mental health, substance abuse and support group resources, referrals and programs.

CAARE – The Healing Center (Community Action Advocacy Restoration and Empowerment)

214 Broadway St., Durham, NC, 27701
919-683-5300
caare-inc.org.

CAARE – The Healing Center's mission is to provide effective prevention and case management services to at-risk persons and their families in Durham by referring health and social resources that can alleviate isolation yet foster independence; to empower the population with preventative health education, counseling, and testing by establishing and maintaining networks and utilizing resources that address the health and social needs of the community; and to provide decent housing that is affordable to low- to moderate-income people.

COASTAL

New Hanover Regional Medical Center

2131 S. 17th St., Wilmington, NC 28401
910-667-7000
nhrmc.org/services/hiv-aids.

New Hanover Regional Medical Center provides comprehensive care for patients of all ages and throughout each stage of HIV, from acute HIV to latency to AIDS. Satellite clinics are in Whiteville, N.C., Jacksonville, N.C. and Burgaw, N.C.

WESTERN

ALFA

1120 Fairgrove Church Rd. S.E., Suite 28,
Hickory, NC 28602
828-322-1447
alfainfo.org.

ALFA, formerly known as AIDS Leadership Foothills Area-Alliance, has provided supportive services to those infected and/or affected by HIV/AIDS. ALFA currently provides supportive and medical case management, prevention education, and outreach to a nine-county service area. ALFA's service area consists of Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Lincoln, Watauga and Wilkes Counties.

SOUTH CAROLINA

Affinity Health Center
455 Lakeshore Pky., Rock Hill, SC 29730
803-909-6363
affinityhealthcenter.org.
Affinity Health Center, formerly known as Catawba Health Care, provides primary care and specialist referrals, nutritional counseling, counseling and mental healthcare/services, dental care, case management and support, HIV specialty care and HIV/STD testing. It serves York, Chester and Lancaster Counties with satellites in Clover, Fort Mill and York, S.C.

AID Upstate
13 S. Calhoun St., Greenville, SC 29601
864-250-0607
811 Pendleton St. Suite 11, Greenville, NC 29601
aidupstate.org.
AID Upstate provides supportive services to people affected by HIV/AIDS in Anderson, Greenville, Oconee and Pickens Counties of South Carolina. Its medical needs are handled in partnership with New Horizon Family Health Services (Greenville, S.C.) and ANMED Infectious Disease Clinic (Anderson, S.C.).

Careteam +
100 Professional Park Dr., Conway, SC 29526
843-234-0005
careteamplus.org.
Careteam provides supportive services for individuals living with HIV, including

medical care, case management, HIV testing, counseling and education, risk assessment and counseling and screening in Horry, Georgetown and Williamsburg Counties.

Palmetto Community Care
5064 Rivers Ave., Charleston, SC 29405
843-747-2273
aids-services.com.
For more than two decades, Palmetto Community Care (formerly known as Lowcountry AIDS Services) has been serving those living with HIV/AIDS in Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester Counties. It provides case management, access to medical care and housing, financial, nutritional and legal assistance along with other supportive services in the Charleston area. PCC also works to prevent the growth of the epidemic through education, media campaigns, community outreach and free, daily HIV/STD testing.

PALSS (Palmetto AIDS Life Support Services)
2638 Two Notch Rd., Suite 108, Columbia, SC 29204
803-779-7257
palss.org.
Palmetto AIDS Life Support Services offers free services to individuals who have been diagnosed with or are at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS, as well as providing support to its clients' loved ones. It offers HIV testing, among other healthcare needs, along with support groups and adjunct assistance. PALSS maintains a food pantry for its clients.

Piedmont Care Inc.
Wells Fargo Building

101 N. Pine St., Suite 200, Spartanburg, SC 29302
864-582-7773
piedmontcare.org.
Piedmont Care is a non-profit organization providing HIV/AIDS care, prevention and advocacy in Spartanburg, Cherokee, and Union counties of South Carolina.

CareSouth Carolina/Care Innovations
1268 South Fourth St., Hartsville, SC 29550
843-857-0111
737 South Main St., Society Hill, SC 29593
843-378-4501
caresouth-carolina.com/care-services/hiv-aids/.
CareSouth Carolina, through Care Innovations, provides comprehensive HIV/AIDS primary health care for individuals in Chesterfield, Darlington, Dillon, Lee and Marlboro Counties. These services are made possible through a federal Ryan White Part C grant. Patients can have a "one-stop shop" experience at CareSouth Carolina.

REGIONAL/ADVOCACY/INFO

North Carolina AIDS Action Network
P.O. Box 25044, Raleigh, NC, 27611-5044
ncaan.org.
The North Carolina AIDS Action Network is a statewide advocacy organization fighting for the rights of people living with HIV/AIDS, their loved ones and those at risk of acquiring HIV/AIDS in North Carolina.

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services

HIV/STD Prevention and Care
<https://epi.dph.ncdhhs.gov/cd/stds/program.html>

NC Harm Reduction Network
nchrc.org.
The North Carolina Harm Reduction Network is a statewide grassroots advocacy, resource development and coalition-building organization that provides direct services for a variety of issues, including drug use, sex work, immigration issues, genders, sexually-transmitted diseases and HIV.

Planned Parenthood - Various locations
bit.ly/2zEFblq.
Planned Parenthood's various locations across the state provide safer sex education and information and HIV testing.

South Carolina Department of Health & Environmental Control
2000 Hampton Street, Columbia
803-898-0749
<https://scdhec.gov/>

HIV/STD Education and Prevention
bit.ly/2NVkWHw. ::

[Ed. Note: Qnotes has prepared this comprehensive list of ASOs, etc. for our readers. To that extent, organizations and agencies may have been omitted. If readers will email editor@qnotescarolinas.com with other listings (must have full name, address, phone number and website), qnotes will be happy to add them to the compilation. List accuracy and integrity are vital. Please report any errors or changes that need to be made.]

TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR HEALTH

STAY HEALTHY

LGBTQ+ Friendly Primary Care | HIV Specialty Care
Adult Hormone Replacement Therapy | Dental Care
Behavioral Health | Avita Pharmacy | PrEP and PEP

GET TESTED


FREE Confidential Testing | Rapid HIV | Rapid HEP C
Chlamydia & Gonorrhea
affinityhealthcenter.org/get-tested

WALK-IN TESTING


Monday - Thursday
8:30 am - 6:00 pm
Friday 8:30 am - 4:00 pm
Wednesdays (closed 12 pm - 1:30 pm)

FREE HIV SELF-TESTS (York, Chester, and Lancaster County Residents)
affinityhealthcenter.org/request-a-test

Order Online!



WORLD AIDS DAY




Affinity HEALTH CENTER

PLAY YOUR PART IN STOPPING HIV STIGMA

I talk to my friends about HIV

I Learned about U=U

I made an appointment to get on PrEP



Affinity HEALTH CENTER

877.647.6363 803.909.6363
455 LAKESHORE PKWY. | ROCK HILL, SC 29730

affinityhealthcenter.org

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Free HIV testing locations

Providing a vital lifeline for those effected by HIV/AIDS

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), many individuals have never been tested for HIV. In addition, the CDC states that of the thousands of new HIV diagnoses every year, many are likely transmitted by those unaware that they are HIV-positive.

There are a number of free HIV testing sites across North Carolina and South Carolina. Many also offer testing for other STDs, as well as vaccines for hepatitis and HPV.

Call for information on days, times and for information on all the services they offer. You can also visit gettested.cdc.gov to search for more testing sites in your area.

NORTH CAROLINA

CHARLOTTE

Amity Medical Group
East Charlotte
6010 E. W.T. Harris Blvd.
Charlotte, NC 28215
704-208-4134
9835 Monroe Rd Ste B,
Charlotte, NC 28270
704-208-4134
10508 Park Rd #130
Charlotte, NC 28210
(704) 461-0006
South Charlotte
10508 Park Rd., Suite 130
Charlotte, NC 28210
704-208-0006
amitymed.org.

Atrium Health NorthPark
251 Eastway Dr., Charlotte
704-446-9991
atriumhealth.org.

Carolinas Care Partnership
5855 Executive Dr., Ste. 101, Charlotte
704-531-2467
carolinascare.org.

Lake Norman Community Health Clinic
14230 Hunters Rd., Huntersville
704-316-6611
lnchc.org.

Mecklenburg County Health Department
Southeast Campus
249 Billingsley Rd., Charlotte
704-336-6500
bit.ly/2qGKnkY.

Mecklenburg County Health Department Northwest Campus
2845 Beatties Ford Rd., Charlotte
704-336-6500
bit.ly/2qGKnkY.

Novant Health
(Fee based)
1900 Randolph Rd., Suite 216, Charlotte
704-316-5330
bit.ly/36cVfLH.

Planned Parenthood South Atlantic Charlotte Health Center
700 S. Torrence St., Charlotte
704-536-7233
bit.ly/2GIKJzV.

RAO Community Health
321 W. 11th St., Charlotte
704-237-8793
raoassist.org.

RAIN
601 E. 5th St., Ste. 470, Charlotte
704-372-7246
carolinarain.org.

Rosedale Health and Wellness
103 Commerce Centre Dr., #103, Huntersville
704-948-8582
myrosedalehealth.com.

Quality Home Care Services Inc.
3552 Beatties Ford Rd., Charlotte
704-394-8968
qhcsnc.org.

Reserve Health
(Fee based)
135 W. 10th St., Charlotte
704-626-3994
reservehealth.com.

University of North Carolina at Charlotte Student Health Center
9530 Poplar Terrace Dr., Charlotte
704-687-7400
studenthealth.uncc.edu.

Urban Ministry Center
945 N. College St., Charlotte
704-347-0278
urbanministrycenter.org.

Walgreens Specialty Pharmacy
1500 E. 3rd St., Charlotte
704-526-4651
bit.ly/2zwQgVt.

ASHEVILLE

Buncombe County Department of Health
40 Cox Ave., Asheville 28801
828-250-5000
buncombecounty.org/Governing/Depts/Health.

Asheville VA Medical Center
1100 Tunnel Rd., Asheville
828-298-7911
asheville.va.gov.
Eligibility requirement: Only open to veterans.

Planned Parenthood South Atlantic Asheville Health Center
68 McDowell St., Asheville
828-252-7928
plannedparenthood.org/planned-parent-hood-south-atlantic.

Western North Carolina AIDS Project
554 Fairview Rd., Asheville
828-252-7489
wncap.org.

Carrboro University of North Carolina School of Medicine
301 Lloyd St., Carrboro
984-538-1031
Appointment Only
unc.live/2PomrRU.

Chapel Hill Piedmont Health Services Inc.
107 Connor Drive., Chapel Hill 27514
919-933-8494
piedmonthealth.org.

Planned Parenthood Chapel Hill Health Center
1765 Dobbins Dr., Chapel Hill
919-942-7762
plannedparenthood.org/planned-parent-hood-south-atlantic.

Orange County Health Department Southern Human Services
2501 Homestead Rd., Chapel Hill
919-245-2400
orangecountync.gov/health.

DURHAM

CAARE – The Healing Center
214 Broadway St., Durham
919-683-5300
caare-inc.org.

Durham County Department of Public Health
414 E. Main St., Durham
919-560-7600
dconc.gov/publichealth.

Gateway Campus, Durham
4113 Capitol St., Suite B, Durham
919-251-9444
<https://gatewaywomens.care/services/sti-testing/>

Lincoln Community Health Center
1301 Fayetteville St., Durham
919-956-4000
lincolnchc.org.

Planned Parenthood South Atlantic Durham Health Center
105 Newsom St., Suite 101, Durham
919-286-2872
plannedparenthood.org/planned-parent-hood-south-atlantic.

Samaritan Health Clinic-East
507 E. Knox St., Durham
919-407-8223
samaritanhealthcenter.org.

Samaritan Health Clinic-South
3205 University Drive, Suite 107, Durham
919-407-8223
samaritanhealthcenter.org.

Triangle Empowerment Center
931 E Main St, Durham, NC 27701
800-806-3558
triempowerment.org.

FAYETTEVILLE

Planned Parenthood South Atlantic Fayetteville Health Center
4551 Yadkin Rd., Fayetteville
866-942-7762
plannedparenthood.org/planned-parent-hood-south-atlantic.

Fuquay Varina
Hand of Hope Pregnancy Centers
607 N. Ennis St., Fuquay Varina
919-577-9050
yourchoicepregnancyclinic.com.

GREENSBORO

Alcohol and Drug Services
1101 Carolina St, Greensboro, NC 27401
336-333-6860, ext 250
adsyes.org/free-hiv-testing.

Guilford County Health Department
1100 E. Wendover Ave., Greensboro
336-641-3245
bit.ly/2T2TUzO.

Nia Community Action Center Self Help Building
122 N. Elm St., Ste. 520, Greensboro
336-617-7722
niacacinc.org.

Piedmont Health Services and Sickle Cell Agency
1102 E. Market St., Greensboro
336-274-1507
piedmonthealthservices.org.

Planned Parenthood South Atlantic Greensboro Health Center
1704 Battleground Ave., Greensboro
336-373-0678
plannedparenthood.org/planned-parent-hood-south-atlantic.

Triad Health Project
801 Summit Ave., Greensboro
336-275-1654
triadhealthproject.org.

GREENVILLE

Pitt County AIDS Service Organization (PiCASO)
3219 Landmark St., Ste. 9B, Greenville
252-830-1660
bit.ly/2Nz4NIT.

HIGH POINT

Guilford County Health Department
501 E. Green Dr., High Point
336-641-3245
bit.ly/2T2TUzO.

Piedmont Health Services and Sickle Cell Agency
401 Taylor Ave., High Point
336-886-6261
piedmonthealthservices.org.

Triad Health Project
501 W. Westwood Ave., High Point
336-884-4116
triadhealthproject.org.

HILLSBOROUGH

Orange County Health Department
Whitted Human Services Center
300 W. Tryon St., Hillsborough
919-245-2400
orangecountync.gov/health.

RALEIGH

Alliance of AIDS Services- Carolina
3109 Poplarwood Ct suite 200, Raleigh
919-834-2437
aas-c.org.

Gateway Campus, Hillsborough
1306 Hillsborough St., Raleigh
919-833-0096
<https://gatewaywomens.care/services/sti-testing/>

LGBT Center of Raleigh
3109 Poplarwood Court, Suite 209, Raleigh, NC 27604
919-832-4484
lgbtcentroraaleigh.com.

Planned Parenthood South Atlantic Raleigh Health Center
100 S. Boylan Ave., Raleigh
919-833-7526
plannedparenthood.org/planned-parent-hood-south-atlantic.

Wake County Human Services Center at Departure Drive
5809 Departure Drive, Raleigh 27616
919-212-7000
bit.ly/2JWiz4A.

Womens Center of Wake County Incorporated
2200 New Bern Avenue, Raleigh 27292
919-829-3711
wcwc.org.

Your Choice Pregnancy
1701 Jones Franklin Rd., Raleigh
919-758-8444
yourchoicepregnancyclinic.com.

WILMINGTON

Planned Parenthood South Atlantic Wilmington Health Center
1925 Tradd Ct., Wilmington
910-762-5566
plannedparenthood.org/planned-parent-hood-south-atlantic.

WINSTON-SALEM

Forsyth County Department of Public Health
799 N. Highland Ave., Winston-Salem
336-703-3100
bit.ly/2RO7NA7.

Planned Parenthood South Atlantic Winston-Salem Health Center
3010 Maplewood Avenue,
Winston-Salem, NC 27613
336-768-2980
plannedparenthood.org/planned-parent-hood-south-atlantic.

Positive Wellness Alliance
400 E Center St, Lexington, NC 27292
336-772-0976
positivewellnessalliance.org.

SOUTH CAROLINA

CHARLESTON

Fetter Health Care Network Downtown Health Center
51 Nassau St., Charleston
843-722-4112
fetterhealthcare.org.

Palmetto Community Care
5064 Rivers Ave, North Charleston, SC 29406
843-747-2273
palmettocommunitycare.org.

Planned Parenthood South Atlantic Charleston Health Center
1312 Ashley River Rd., Charleston
843-628-4380
plannedparenthood.org/planned-parent-hood-south-atlantic.

COLUMBIA

Acercamiento Hispano de Carolina del Sur
87 Wild Wood Ave., Columbia
803-419-5112
schispanicoutreach.org.

AIDS Healthcare Foundation AHF Columbia Grace Medical Group
3025 Farrow Rd., Columbia 29203
803-933-0288
aidshealth.org.

Palmetto AIDS Life Support Services of South Carolina
2638 Two Notch Rd., Ste. 108, Columbia
803-779-7257
palss.org.

Planned Parenthood South Atlantic Columbia Health Center
2712 Middleburg Dr., Suite 107, Columbia
803-256-4908
plannedparenthood.org/planned-parent-hood-south-atlantic.

South Carolina Department of Health & Environmental Control
2000 Hampton Street, Columbia
803-898-0749
<https://scdhec.gov/>

ROCK HILL

Affinity Health Center
455 Lakeshore Pky., Rock Hill
803-909-6363
affinityhealthcenter.org ::





LAUNDRY SERVICES



CLOTHING CLOSET



FOOD PANTRY



COMPUTER AND MEDIA USE



SHOWERING SERVICES



JOB FAIRS & RESUME BUILDING



COUNSELING



HIV/STI TESTING



THE DROP

RAIN's drop-in center provides a safe and welcoming space that is all about inclusivity and empowerment. A place for our community to come together to access support and resources they need.

5114 Monroe Road • thedropclt.org



RAIN
Love. Policy. Words. or without it.
carolinarain.org



Accessible Healthcare for ALL



Accepting New Patients!
Uninsured, Underinsured and Major Health Insurances Welcome!



Adult Pediatric and Primary Care



HIV Care



Behavioral Health Care



Substance Abuse Treatment



Contact Us



Text Our Number!
(743) 800-2015



Visit Our Website
www.amitymed.org

SCAN ME





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Twice a year PrEP offers an alternative to daily pills

New option is changing how people think about HIV infection



by Wendy Lyons
Qnotes Staff Writer

PrEP has existed for years in the form of a daily pill, but a newer option is changing how people think about HIV prevention. Lenacapavir, also marketed under the names Yeztugo and Sublenca, is used for patients who are HIV negative and want to avoid infection; and those who are HIV positive, specifically for those with multi-drug-resistant HIV. It was approved by the FDA in 2025 and offers protection through just two injections a year. Many people find that this rhythm feels more manageable, especially if life makes daily medication hard to remember. Early reporting through the Associated Press and clinical summaries shared by The Body Pro show strong effectiveness and positive feedback from people in studies.

In North Carolina the need for more prevention choices is real. The NC Department of Health and Human Services reports that Black adults and adolescents account for more than half of new HIV diagnoses statewide. Young adults between 20 and 34 continue to have the highest diagnosis rate. In Mecklenburg County, health officials point out that gay and bisexual men, especially men of color, experience higher diagnosis rates and lower viral suppression compared to other groups. Those numbers

tell us that flexible prevention options can play a meaningful role in closing gaps.

Before deciding whether twice a year PrEP is right for someone it helps to break down the basics in a simple way.

What it is...

- A long acting injectable medication given twice per year.
- Designed for people who are HIV negative and want ongoing prevention.
- Requires HIV testing before each injection to ensure safe use.

How it works...

- Two office visits a year for the injection.
- Occasional labs as part of routine monitoring.
- Strong protection shown in studies referenced by News Medical and Gilead's published trial results.

Who may benefit most?

- People who have trouble sticking to a daily pill.
- People who prefer privacy and fewer pharmacy visits.
- Those in communities facing higher HIV risk, such as young adults or Black and Brown LGBTQ residents in North Carolina.

What can you expect to pay?

Cost is one of the most common concerns. The list price is a little over fourteen thousand dollars per injection which totals more than twenty eight thousand dollars a year before insurance or financial assistance. Traditional

daily Prep can cost around twenty two thousand dollars per year. As healthcare costs rise, this difference matters. A study in JAMA Network Open found that drops in Prep access could lead to thousands of additional infections nationwide within a decade and billions in added medical expenses. This means that real access will depend on insurance coverage, state programs, local clinic capacity and education. People often want to understand the trade-offs clearly, so here is a simple comparison.

Potential advantages...

- Only two doses a year.
- High effectiveness.
- Reduces stress about forgetting daily pills.
- May support people in rural areas or places with limited pharmacy access.
- Can feel discreet and easier for people



Lenacapavir, also known as Yeztugo, was approved by the FDA in 2025 and offers protection with just two injections a year.

worried about stigma.

Potential drawbacks...

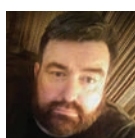
- High cost without insurance or assistance.
- Requires lab work and clinic visits.
- Offers HIV prevention but not protection from other sexually transmitted infections.
- Some clinics are still learning how to administer it.
- Access may vary depending on insurance, geography and provider familiarity.

The bigger picture matters too. Because North Carolina continues to face disparities in HIV rates, access to prevention that meets people where they are can make a difference. For some, this new option could be freeing. For others, the cost might feel like a barrier. Rising healthcare expenses, limited coverage networks and transportation challenges can all shape whether someone can actually receive the medication. This is why local support organizations like Regional AIDS Interfaith Network (R.A.I.N) remain so important. They help people navigate insurance, provide testing and offer emotional support for those sorting through decisions about their health.

Twice a year PrEP does not replace every other prevention method and it is not perfect. Still it offers a meaningful alternative for people who want reliable protection that fits their schedule. Anyone considering it should start with a conversation with a provider or clinic that understands PrEP, costs and eligibility. With the right guidance people can figure out what truly fits their life. ::

There is an alternative to daily antiretroviral therapy

It's a twice annual injectable good for long journeys and times you might not have access to a daily pill



by David Aaron Moore
Qnotes Staff Writer

Anti-retroviral therapy (ART) includes such daily single tablet regimens as Biktarvy and Triumeq, as well as multiple pill plans like Tivicay, Truvada and Descovy.

What has been accomplished with these drugs is nothing short of a miracle. People who once felt they were biding their time and death was waiting around the corner, now see long full lives ahead of them.

But all of these drugs have side effects and just keeping up with taking the pills on a daily basis can be daunting.

For example, the drugs mentioned above, which are beneficial in many ways, can have potential side effects, such as impacting liver and kidney function and causing GI issues.

"I've been having some really nasty GI



Sunlenca, also known as Lenacapavir, is a twice-yearly injectable that can be used for ART resistance and as an alternative to a daily dose.
CREDIT: Publicity image

issues, insane fatigue that is interfering with my life, strange random muscle pain and a fluttering heart rate that has honestly scared the shit out of me more times than once," wrote Jeemo, a participant on a social

media thread about side effects from HIV related medications. "I don't think being on [this medication] is worthwhile for me."

There is an alternative.

Sunlenca, also marketed under the names Yeztugo and Lenacapavir, is FDA approved and used for patients who are HIV negative and want to avoid infection; and those who are HIV positive, specifically for those with multi-drug-resistant HIV. Most importantly, it can be taken as an injection twice a year, and it has been approved for coverage by NC Medicaid.

It does have some side effects, most commonly reactions at the injection site; nausea, itching and headaches. Most side effects are mild to moderate in severity, but studies show they can potentially occur in up to 65 percent of patients.

More serious but less common side effects include Immune Reconstitution Inflammatory Syndrome (IRIS); improper injection technique, which can lead to se-

vere skin damage (necrosis) or open sores and allergic reactions creating symptoms like difficulty breathing, swelling of the face, lips, tongue, or throat, or a severe rash. Keep in mind those are reported as very rare.

What the medication does allow you is freedom from taking a daily pill. Be aware: If you don't have health insurance, the list price for Yeztugo is over \$14,000 per injection, adding up to a total of somewhere around \$28,000 per year for the recommended two injections.

Amid that mix of good and bad news, there is another positive aspect: the drug manufacturer, Gilead Sciences, offers a patient assistance program that provides Yeztugo at no cost to eligible individuals who are uninsured or underinsured.

Last bit of advice, talk with your physician and determine if it's an alternative that will possibly work for you physically, and you can financially qualify. ::

Our People: Leronald Reid, Jr.

HIV & LGBTQ advocate speaks



by L'Monique King
Qnotes Staff Writer

There's a gentle giant living in Charlotte. Inspired by both his grandmothers (one living and one deceased), Leronald Reid, Jr. is affectionately known to friends and family simply, as Junior Reid.

From the home he shares with a younger cousin and Polar Bear, his three year old poodle, Reid spoke with us about his life and passions for advocacy. As public health support for those facing health care disparity, Reid draws inspiration from both his grandmothers. His only living grandmother reminds him to speak with and empower youth without trepidation or shame. The grandmother he lost in 2023 also continues to inspire him as Reid frequently listens to hours of secretly recorded conversations bursting with love, laughter and advice.

A University of North Carolina Wilmington alumni with a Master's in Communication and Marketing Reid tends to a plant his paternal grandmother (who passed in 2023) left to his father. From his brightly lit split level apartment in Charlotte, he shares his thoughts.

L'Monique King: Are you a native Charlottean?

Junior Reid: No, I'm actually from a small town in South Carolina called Andrews. It's in between Myrtle Beach and Charleston, so low country; where there's good seafood and all of that.

LMK: How long have you been in Charlotte?

LRJ: Ooooh, going on 15 years now. So much has changed that I have to use my GPS sometimes. Charlotte has grown a lot regarding development, growth and business opportunities. But I do feel like when it comes to LGBTQ opportunities for social activities, there's been a pause. Many of the places that once existed no longer do and it's disheartening. There's no LGBTQ Community Center and the club scene isn't what it used to be. Scorpio's has moved and the vibe just isn't the same. There's still The Woodshed but that's more of a bar than a club where you could experience a show and the full experience of club life. My younger folks and family don't have many places to go to just let their hair down and be a part of the LGBTQ social scene.

LMK: What do you enjoy about Charlotte?

LRJ: I love that Charlotte is big but small at the same time. The degrees of separation aren't that great and community feels like family – I meet and engage with many people who are all fighting for causes like public health issues and personal growth and development. It's pretty cool.

LMK: In what part of Charlotte do you reside?

LRJ: In the University area. I've only lived in the University City area since moving to Charlotte. I'm about five minutes from UNC Charlotte and very familiar with everything my neighborhood has to offer. Everything else is an adventure <giggles> due to all the changes.

LMK: Do you have any siblings?

LRJ: I do. I have a sister. She's three years older than me and lives in Concord. We're close, though we don't talk every day. She has a little girl, my niece that I spoil when I can.

LMK: Are you happily partnered or single and ready to mingle?

LRJ: I am partnered and it's new. I think now that I'm out of my 20s when all I did was work and work and work, that I can finally enjoy life with someone else. My partner supports every dream and aspiration that I have and even when it seems crazy, he makes me feel like it's something I can bring to reality. He really is a breath of fresh air I'm glad to have in my life.

LMK: What's it like being an out gay man in the south during such a turbulent political climate?

LRJ: It is definitely scary. I try to see the glass as half full, so although it's scary, I've known I was gay my whole life and the fear doesn't outweigh my purpose and what I'm here to do. When I think of Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks and so many others that stood up in the face of fear to do what was right, I'm inspired to stay focused, out and in community.

LMK: Would you consider yourself a realist or an optimist?

LRJ: Oh my gosh. It's the half glass type of thing. I'm in touch with reality but I'm so optimistic even when things aren't great – I know I can do anything I put my mind to. So, I'm that person that turns adversity into opportunity.

LMK: So, you're an optimist realist. What do you do for a living?

LRJ: I work in insurance. I have my Property and Casualty License and have done that for about five years. But ultimately, my passion is HIV and advocacy for those living with HIV or at risk of contracting it. It started with self-advocacy. As a person living with HIV since 2019, it started with me having been given misinformation about the income guidelines for Ryan White; I was told I made too much to qualify for assistance – I didn't. Ryan White is a federally funded program that ensures that folks living with HIV ... have access to medication. The cost of HIV medication is expensive, so programs like Ryan White are lifesaving. That's just one of the reasons I took my advocacy beyond me and my personal experiences.

As an advocate I routinely attend conferences on everything from Criminalization Laws to new medications. I am a Ryan White Planning Body Voting Member; which gives me voice in making decisions about how federal monies are spent. I've also served as a CAB (Community Advisory Board) member for local health and wellness organizations and whenever I can I lend my voice and knowledge anywhere I can to assist people in need. But <chuckling> to keep the lights on and pay the bills, I have my career in insurance.

LMK: Describe your best day ever.

LRJ: Well, I started a nonprofit, Living HAPI [HIV Awareness Prevention & Intervention]. It started with an Instagram page and now I have 501c3 status. My best day though was being able to represent my nonprofit at a congressional meeting at the white house. I was at a round table discussion where I was able to talk about some of the connections between housing and HIV. As a little brown boy from a small town in South Carolina, I never imagined I'd be at the White House having that conversation. It was a real full circle moment. This was during the Biden administration where the atmosphere was more welcoming to the LGBTQ community.

LMK: If you could wave a magic wand and stop one thing, what would it be and why?

LRJ: I would say homelessness. I think everyone deserves the basic necessities of housing, running water and heat. So much needs to be done and there's so much that many people don't think about or understand. We don't see as many home-



Laidback gentleman Leronald "Junior" Reid is warm, engaging and ready to fight for the rights of the underserved. CREDIT: Katherine of Wild Light Company

less residents uptown anymore – but not because they're housed, because someone wants to build a new apartment complex and [doesn't] want the homeless community to make it look bad. They'd rather not see the problem. So instead of opening another homeless shelter, Charlotte's homeless have been pushed into unfamiliar territories and neighborhoods where they don't have as many options or access to some of the things they need to just get by day to day.

LMK: What frightens you?

LRJ: I hate to sound so cliché but failure. I fear not achieving goals and sometimes that has me neglecting the fact that I tried. I heard someone speak during a Zoom meeting recently and they mentioned how you can feel alone in facing challenges. But when you have a connection with God you know you're never alone. Through my [faith and spiritual] connection I'm able to get through many challenges. I truly believe that man's rejection is God's protection. Anyone can get caught up in the world's expectations of them, where they should be in life and what they think success should mean. So, I'm navigating that so that every missed opportunity or re-focused goals doesn't become me internalizing failure. At the end of the day, it's ultimately about God's purpose for me.

LMK: With the winter holiday quickly approaching, have you thought about what you want for Christmas?

LRJ: I'll be at Virginia Beach for Christmas. It's on my bucket list and it will be my first time visiting so I'm getting what I want for Christmas. I hope to still get a gift but if not, I'll be completely satisfied with that. ::



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