**Capital Region ETE Steering Committee Meeting Minutes**

**Zoom Call November 16, 2021**

**Attendees List:**

1. Kyla Loucks – Albany Medical Center
2. Vanessa Gonzalez – In Our Own Voices
3. Ashley Smith – Peer Advocate, Albany Medical Center
4. Jeannie Haller – Ellis Medicine
5. Whitney Closson­ – MHANYS
6. Megan Green, RN-Albany Med
7. Diane DeGroat, Senior Attorney, Legal Aid Society of Northeastern NY
8. Donna Muller – PreP Coordinator, Albany Medical Center
9. John Hartigan, AIDS Institute, Bureau of Community Support Services
10. Meghan Thompson, Retention Adherence Specialist, Ellis Medicine
11. Scott Daly – PLWHIV, and Peer Advocate Ellis Family Health
12. Perry Junjulas - Executive Director & PWA, Albany Damien Center
13. Sue Johnson, PrEP Specialist, Whitney Young Health
14. Grace Fay – Alliance for Positive Health
15. Akeem Tyrell - Albany Damien Center
16. Karen Bovell, AIDS Institute
17. Christine Wasick – Albany Medical Center
18. Steven Sawicki, NYLinks
19. Jeff H – Alliance for Positive Health
20. Brooke Strauss – Albany med
21. Amy Palma – Unity House of Troy

**Call to Order** – Co-chairs Kyla Loucks & Vanessa Gonzales welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 9:00

Welcome – Vanessa Gonzalez, Committee Chair. Kyla Loucks joined in late. Lauren Quinn is not able to attend.

**Minutes Review**

There was some report back from the sub-committees; Youth sub-committee talked a little bit about some of the concerns we’re running into with engaging youth. It was appreciated that Charmaine talked about the listening sessions that were hosted and this is something to consider moving forward, and Vanessa was think-tanking about that idea and the feedback was appreciated from Karen as well. It’s a great way for us to figure out how we can move forward. Everything is going in the right direction.

We had PrEP Aware week last month and it seemed to be successful. The state-wide webinar had around 150 folks join from NYS which Vanessa believes has been the most thus far. The ambassadors represented their journeys really well and there was great feedback.

* **Motion to approve the Meeting Minutes from the October meeting. Scott Daly motioned to approve the minutes; Grace Fay seconded the motion. No one abstained or opposed the motion.**

Meeting minutes will be sent to the Committee and will be posted on the Damien Center Website.

**Legislative Update – Perry Junjulas**

Donna, we will miss you and thank you for all that you have done for the PrEP sub-committee. Best of luck moving forward.

The governor’s office had asked us to give them our priorities. About a month ago we went into high gear to come up with a list of priorities. The documents have been mailed out to everyone. We wanted to do some re-education on ending the epidemic. The former Governor had supported the ETE plan blueprint, which was developed back in 2015, we also understand that there was not full support around providing all the resources on the legislative bills that were necessary to move this past the finish line. There was a lot of progress, but there was a lot of investment that needed to be made. With the new administration, a couple of our aims were:

1. To provide some education what ending the epidemic is;
2. That it didn’t end in 2020;
3. That we are still looking into the future;
4. Recognizing that this is a much different year for the state government in terms of having some money to be able to spend for the first time in a very long time.

Per the document, we’ve broken it down by 3 buckets – Declaring racism a public health crisis, while making concrete health system investments to promote equity. Each of the issues that we discuss tie back to declaring racism as a public health crisis. Included is to permanently repeal Medicaid pharmacy carve-out. Many know this from 340b. We’re looking for a full repeal of that. We recognize that the impact of losing the money from the carve-out will disproportionately affect black and brown communities.

The second bucket is to recommit to ETE by addressing housing access and other key social determinants of health. There are quite a few items listed in this bucket. Right at the top we have Providing equal housing access to HIV housing supports across NYS. This is to ensure that we are getting the 30% lens cap extended outside of New York City, but also what we are looking for is to raise the fair market value to 110% when we are figuring the eligible property. That is more in line with Section 8 and other voucher rules. That will also help New York City, because they are challenged to find apartments at 100% of the fair market values. Another one is Expanding peer and other employment opportunities. We’re looking for $4 million to add to the TBA budget line. This helps persons with HIV return to work, but also will establish a peer workforce that is paid. Scott mentioned providing stipends or pay to persons to be advocates. This is where we are looking to create that model and we can actually get some funding to create a second model and other peer opportunities for $4 million. Another one noted is the Mandate HIV testing on an opt-out basis in all licensed art. 28,31, and 32 facilities. There was a study that was done that showed a large number of the persons who were late testers were shown to have full-blown Aids. This is a lot of missed opportunities to find people who are HIV positive before they progress to Aids, so this would make HIV testing an opt-out. There’s also Comprehensive sexual health education. This is about providing mandatory age-appropriate sexual health education throughout our schools. Within this, there is also legislation that is needed to be able to move any of these things forward.

The 3rd and last bucket is Arrest the worsening injection drug use and opioid overdose epidemic. Our efforts are closely tied to our work in prevention of opioid overdose. We are looking to scale up the harm reduction funding and programming and to approve and fund the pilot overdose prevention centers. This is where we need legislative and budget approval. This has been shown in other areas of the country and the world, to prevent overdoses, but also get persons who are using into early preventative care and provide them with services in a way that meets their needs.

We are working on the details but the meeting with the Governor’s office went very well. In our second meeting we will be working on the 340b carve-out. We’ll look at opportunities to see what can be offered in the State of the State address and also find out what support we can get on a number of these issues. It’s really critical to getting our Ending the Epidemic moving forward.

Slow the worsening injection drug use and opioid overdose epidemic. One of the items in this bucket is Approve and fund pilot overdose prevention centers (OPCs). The meeting with the Governor’s office went very well. There’s a meeting coming up soon on the 340b carveout. We are taking opportunities to work with the governor’s office on many of the critical issues.

There’s also another sheet Perry mailed out that goes into each of the topics and explains them.

The AIDS advisory council ETE meeting is This Thursday. Perry will communicate any other advocacy that is being done. Perry will bring a lot of what he discussed, to the meeting. Feel free to join us; it will be televised live.

Karen – At the Buffalo ETE meeting there was a Vocal member who gave an update. She gave an update that included that Vocal created their own bill called PATHS. She offered to come to our ETE meeting to give a Vocal update. I was curious how that might fit into your lens.

Perry – What we want to get done, could get done in the budget. The PATHS bill can do what we want it to do. Our first order of business is to get the verbiage to where we want it and it should be enough to push this forward. If that does not work, the backup is the PATHS bill, which would have to be legislatively approved. We realize that the budget fix would be easier and cleaner. We’re hoping that the governor will say yes this makes sense to put it in the budget. I will leave it up to the co-chairs on whether or not they want to have Vocal attend a meeting. Vocal is an outstanding source of support and energy and they are a force to be reckoned with when it comes to moving our ETE initiatives forward. I would highly recommend them attend a meeting.

Scott – On the PATHS bill, please give us a brief overview. Is that supposed to open up rental units for people with HIV in Upstate NY?

Perry – The governor’s office thought there was enough supported housing for persons with HIV. There are not enough of the units like the Damien Center; we need more of them. With the PASS bill it states that the localities have to pay the rent for the persons who find an apartment at either fair market value. If they are low income, they would pay 30% of their rent to the landlord and the county would pay the other portion. What we’re asking from the state is to pay the county’s portion. NYC is able to do it because they were told they could use fair market value, but also NYC chips in close to 71% of the cost of this because NYC has a funding source. The state pays 29% and the city pays 71%. In Upstate NY and Long Island, the localities don’t have the money. We’re asking for the State year 1 to fund $10 million to help the counties to cover that cost. But the second part of it is, right now it isn’t law that the counties have to provide that rental subsidy. The problem is that the legislation was put in back in 1980 and the fair market value for an apartment was $480. You can’t find an apartment for $480. In Albany County there are 5 people getting this subsidy. What this bill would do, if you’re a person who has a low income, you’re diagnosed with HIV, you will pay on 30% of your income if you have an apartment that is at fair market value. If there are HUD vouchers or HOPWA vouchers, we’d have to use those first. The Damien Center has both HUD and HOPWA vouchers. We have a waiting list. We’re estimating there are over 4000 persons with HIV who are outside of NYC, they are either homeless or unstably housed right now. That is not ok and it’s not fair. When I was on the governor’s call, I said I felt embarrassed and disheartened that we allow persons in NYC to have housing, while the rest of the state is not allowed. We need to get an equitable process for all New Yorkers and it is the State’s responsibility to provide equity. We’re going full steam ahead with the PATHS bill.

The science and the studies have shown us that housing persons with HIV works. It works to achieve viral suppression, it works to achieve better health outcomes, and we have seen some disparities between New York City and the rest of the state. In NYC we are able to house 28,000 and the rest of the state we’re doing zero. To NYC’s credit, they have been working tirelessly to help us bring this home. We’re all working on the same page. It’s about getting our leaders in government to make this change. It’s about getting our leaders in the NY State government together to make this change. It’s so critical to get a person with AIDS to tell their story and to tell why they need housing.

Please reach out to Perry if you have any questions.

If you register for World AIDS Day, you will see the agenda and all of the information for that event.

Perry has left the meeting.

**Subcommittee Highlight: Youth Sub-Committee: Lauren Quinn, Co-chair – Lyndsi Holmes**

There is some work going on around finding organizations that can support the Youth Sub-Committee, either by joining it or providing them with connections. For In Our Own Voices, we reached out to a couple organizations and are still waiting to hear back from them. Our Director of Health and Human Services has a track record with working with youth, so once Unity Through Diversity has come to a close Vanessa will connect with them so we can talk about having more sub-committees work with youth, whether it’s collaborating or working with events, etc. We will still talk about the idea of having some listening sessions.

**Adult HIV Testing Sub-Committee: Chris Wasik, Co-Chair**

Nothing to report.

**Linkage & Navigation Sub-Committee: Steve Sawicki, Chair**

Nothing to report.

**PrEP Sub-Committee: Donna Muller & Sue Johnson, Co-Chairs**

We had our meeting on November 1st. Donna is leaving Albany Med. She’ll be in Newburgh. Sue will be running it on her own. Vanessa came and represented In Our Own Voices and Jeff H. for the Alliance. Talked about the meeting and who should be representing the PrEP sub-committee. Perhaps instead of a sub-committee, have everyone join into one, for better participation and hearing everyone’s feelings and thoughts.

One of our HIV case managers has decided to take the PrEP position. He did agree to co-chair with Sue. He is very familiar with PrEP.

Karen – I want to make sure that Sue’s suggestion thoughts around doing away with the model of sub-committees and joining in as one. This is something we can discuss in the next meeting and assess if this model continues to work for the ETE group. The ETE regional sub-committees look different; some have subcommittees and some don’t. Let’s see what this will look like in 2022.

Vanessa – Let’s bring this forward for 2022 and have a conversation.

We all wish Donna the best of luck!

**Agency Updates**

Please share with us anything new happening at your agency!

Amy Palma – Unity House – Has a medical transportation coordinator opening. If you know of anyone who has experience, and who is interested, let Amy know. They must have a valid driver’s license, clean record and experience working with people with AIDS. Her contact information is 518-763-5165.

The Genoa Pharmacy, which is housed in our main building, has Covid boosters and it is available to anyone in the community. They’ll take walk-ins Monday through Friday.

Karen – AIDS institute – We were awarded $850,000 from the CDC in response to an RFA that pertains to funding opportunities to meet viral suppression and maintain that among state prison inmates released to the community. The grant is specific to Upstate NY. It provides support for people who are re-entering the community. It’s managed by the criminal justice unit.

We also received additional funding early this year to increase our disease intervention and specialist workforce. We’re hoping to create more impactful services by increasing this workforce.

The NYS Peer Certification Initiative has added a continuing education concentration in HIV and Aging. If you have any peers that are looking for that concentration, workers who are certified can take that. Karen will get further information to everyone.

There were some hybrid opportunities and we’ll have Justin reach out to Ashley Smith.

Diane DeGroat – Legal Aid – NYS eviction moratorium for people who submitted the hardship declaration is set to expire on January 15th. If your clients are HIV positive, they can call me directly. We’ve also received a significant amount of funding to do housing work throughout our 16-county area.

We provide assistance in advance planning documents such as living will, powers of attorney, etc. if you are interested in getting a presentation on them, give Diane a call. We have the benefits counseling program and hiring for that paralegal position. If you know anyone who is interested in applying, Diane can send you the information.

Diane DeGroat, HIV/AIDS Law Consortium - Legal Aid, 518-533-5930, ddegroat@lasnny.org

Brooke Strause – Providing services to youth for HIV STI testing and treatments. Available for same-day and next day appointments. We provide free HIV rapid testing. We try to promote it one week each month.

Jeff H – Alliance for positive health. The testing program is now mostly fully staffed. We’ve expanded our testing back into the River Street Club. The River Street Club will be doing our appointment only testing on the first three Sundays in December. Also doing appointment-only testing on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays in December except the week between Christmas and New Year’s. We’ve noticed that there’ s been an increase in STDs again. Surge in chlamydia and gonorrhea. We’ve had scenarios where the urine came back negative but the rectal came back positive. It’s not gender specific; it’s really age specific. The big bulk is under 25. We are seeing many more rectal tests come back positive.

Cam, our new director, is doing really well.

Grace Fay – If you have clients that are in need of assistance. We’re getting more referrals in that younger population, between 18 and 32 age range. If anyone would like us to do a presentation at their location, we’re ready to do that. If we can be of any assistance, please let us know.

Grace Fay

Alliance for Positive Health

Health Insurance Access Program (HIAP)

gfay@alliancefph.org

518-801-4368

Ashley Smith – AMC – Director of client services, Ivy Shoulders is interested in having folks come in and do presentations. If there is anyone else out there who is interested in doing a presentation let Ashley know and she’ll get the information to Ivy. We’re getting an unusual number of false positives for HIV tests. We’re getting an unusual number.

Jeff to let Ashley know if there are any false positives with the rapid tests.

Vanessa – In Our Own Voices – Saturday the 20th is Trans Day Remembrance. We are doing a walk-in test clinic from 12:00-2:00 at In Our Own Voices. The goal is to ensure that folks that identify as TGNCNB have access to testing, especially on Saturday. From 6:00-8:00p.m. we’re holding a candlelight vigil at the First Unitarian Society of Albany, located at 405 Washington Ave. We’re doing a eulogy for trans folks of color who have lost their lives due to murder this year. We’re at 42 deaths. We have some folks coming from New York City and they are trans fem non-binary. They’ve been in Pose, have their own documentary; a reality series, and they are a person with color. We are inviting you all to participate. This will be televised. Reach out to Vanessa for more information. We are now doing in-person testing. We’re hoping we can open the doors again in January for walk-ins.

**New Business**

Follow up discussion on identifying goal(s) of overall committee and next steps: Plan for 2022

How do we create time and space to focus on goal(s) – what does this look like

Kyla and Vanessa will discuss and then send out a survey to the ETE. Do we want to structure and remodel as Karen suggested? This gives us time to talk to our centers and come to a conclusion to what we want to do.

Sue – A survey is a great idea.

Scott – It would be a good idea if we had what the future of ETE is. We’ve finished the 5-year period in 2020 and I’m wondering what the goals are of ending the epidemic in this state. Let’s come up with a goal or a plan.

Karen – after the Summit, the AIDS Institute puts out a newsletter. After the summit, the AIDS institute may come up with some thoughts and guidance. I think to starting with a survey is good.

**The meeting adjourned at 10:10a.m.**

**ETE Capital Region Meetings are from 9 AM to 10:30 AM on**

(Meetings are generally the **third Tuesday** of each month except Aug & Dec that we take off)

Nov 16

NO DEC MEETING

Next meeting January 18, 2022

**Co-Chair Contact information**

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Vanessa Gonzalez [vgonzalez@inourownvoices.org](mailto:vgonzalez@inourownvoices.org) 518-432-4188 (work) or 518-491-1554 (work cell)

ETE Webpage at <http://www.albanydamiencenter.org/capital-region-ete.html>