



# HIV + Aging Research Project | PS

## \*NEWSLETTER\*

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December - January 2024

### Looking back and Looking Forward

*Our Year-End Summary of Our Work Advocating for Those Aging with HIV*



**Steven Drew Auerbach**  
*Chief Operating Officer/  
Director of Development*

It's that time of year again when we sit back and take stock of the past 12 months and set goals for the future. Personally, I've given up on trying to fit into those 31" jeans, obsessing over getting my steps in, and adopting a diet of wheatgrass and quinoa. If the past is prologue, I've decided to lay-off the lofty resolutions and look toward how this past year, has prepared myself and HARP-PS for future opportunities for growth – and grow we have!

It's hard to believe that we are entering our tenth year as a non-profit. A decade ago, our talented and brilliant Executive Director, Jeff Taylor got together with a group of physicians, researchers, activists, and HIV+ individuals to meet and study the long-term effects of HIV+ on an aging population. Since then, we have grown slowly, but surely into established community partners doing both HIV and aging research along with offering an educational program that becomes more robust every year. This year, Jeff received the incredible honor of being named to The Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS. He also continued to be the Community Engagement Coordinator for RID-HIV, one of ten Collaboratory's in the Martin Delaney Collaboratory for HIV Cure. Additionally he represented and presented for HARP-PS at The International AIDS conference in Munich, as well as conferences in San Diego, Houston, Washington DC, and Denver - all the while continuing to give important exposure and build

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resources for us to meet our continued mission of improving the lives of the large and growing population of long-term HIV and AIDS survivors by studying the impacts of long-term HIV disease and its treatments on the natural aging process.

**Here's a bit of what we have accomplished this year and some of our goals for 2025:**

### **Positive Life Series**

Our monthly series continued this year in partnership with The Palm Springs Cultural Center. In addition to our usual, stellar line up of speakers addressing everything from HIV and the law to critical research updates, we added a few new topics; like HIV and Spirituality, Cognitive Approaches to Chronic Pain, and Identity Grief – What would you do if there was a cure available? In 2025 we are presenting new topics such as HIV and Prostate Health, as well as Body Dysmorphia and HIV.

### **Positively Aging Project**

For the 9th year in a row, we produced this event with our valued community partners. This year's theme was "Legacy – Inspiring Stories from People Thriving With HIV". It was fun, insightful and filled with laughter and tears. Highlights included our keynote speaker, activist Waheedah Shabaz-El, a self-described 70-plus African American, Muslim woman and retired U.S. postal worker, who was formerly incarcerated and diagnosed with AIDS in 2003. She is also the founding and advisory member of Positive Women's Network-USA, coordinator of PWN-Philly, and Director of Community Engagement for The Reunion Project in addition to many more titles and accomplishments. Other standout speakers were Bill Kavanaugh, LMFT, author of "Keep Your Fork! Something Sweet is Coming" (all attendees received a signed copy of Bill's book). Additionally, our panel of "Four Decades of HIV" made up of individuals representing each decade of HIV was enlightening, heartfelt, and powerful - causing the tissues to fly and leading to a profound sense of comradery amongst the attendees.

### **The First Annual "SHE is Women's Conference**

Shifting the Narrative, Healing her Spirit, Embracing the Future, spearheaded by our own Bridgette Picou, LVN and Board Member in June. This conference drew participants from Riverside, Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and San Diego Counties, for a day of sharing,

education, support, creativity laughter. Bridgette speaks about this in her article "*Hello HARP+PS Family*" on page 3.

### **The 3rd Annual Timothy Ray Brown Community Cure Symposium on World AIDS Day December 1st, 2024**

This year, in partnership with The Palm Springs Art Museum, we are once again having our World AIDS Day Community Cure symposium with special guests Marc Franke, "The Dusseldorf Patient" and Paul Edmonds "The City of Hope Patient", along with researchers from the University of Southern California, The Scripps Research Institute, and City of Hope to discuss the latest progress in HIV cure research. After a brief intermission there will be a program, A Day With(out) Art and the film, Red Reminds Me... that is composed of 7 shorts produced by the nonprofit, Visual AIDS, reflecting the emotional spectrum of living with HIV today. This will be followed by a panel discussion made up of local activists and doctors who experienced the AIDS crisis firsthand.

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**Bridgette Piccou**

## Hello HARP+PS Family!

Is anyone else wondering how the year got away from them? I'm seeing posts that say "There are 1-2-3 days until Christmas" on my timeline, and I'm not ready! I do hope the year was more kind to you than not, and that you we're able to get a few of the things you wanted and all of the good things you deserve.

I'm reflecting on the year and how I have grown and how not only my HIV advocacy journey has changed, but also how my relationship with my HIV has changed. That sounds strange to some, but there is an ebb and flow and push and pull to how I feel about life with HIV. We have to get along, this HIV and me. It affects how I see the world sometimes, and often, how the world sees me, I don't love it, but I no

longer hate it, so it's a relationship.

Since relationships require work, I spent some time thinking about the ways in which I have worked on and with HIV this year, and I got so much done. Between learning new things about science and the virus, seeing potential new innovations for treatments, and using my skills and voice to advocate for others, I'm pleasantly surprised at how far I have come this year.

One of my favorite accomplishments from this year was the SHE is Women's conference I put together with the support and guidance of the talented folks that make up HARP+PS. Fellowship and community mean a lot to me, and any time people come together and find fun or joy amid the diagnosis, it fills me up in the best way. Palm Springs is not typically a place where we think about women, but it is such a beautiful place and so accepting (for the most part) of those of us with HIV, being able to see women show up in the fullness of themselves, and having the support of men in the community was a beautiful thing. The plans in my head are waiting to jump to fruition!

I'm incredibly excited anticipating the new year and already thinking of ways to continue to expand and grow. The 2025 women's conference will be part of that. Who knows, maybe some of you reading this will show up to participate and volunteer your time and wisdom. I believe men and women living with the virus have more in common than most think, and we grow when we share. I will see you soon, and until then, I pray you keep well, feel safe and seen, and are blessed.

You matter!



**June 14th 2025**  
**Women's Conference**  
**SAVE THE DATE**

# Hopeless for the Holidays? Advice to Help You Cope

Republished from POZ Magazine November 18th 2024

The holiday season—that “festive” stretch between Thanksgiving and New Year’s Day—can be a lot for anyone, especially following a divisive election season, but it can be especially fraught for people living with HIV and/or those who are LGBTQ. Conservative relatives, financial and time pressure and stress over who does or doesn’t know your HIV and/or LGBTQ status can sometimes render getting together with people more ordeal than delight.

“Often, my clients tell me that when they visit their biological family at the holidays, they turn into a younger version of themselves, who they were when they were living with their family, and they’re not quite able to come to these gatherings as their realized adult selves,” says Scott Rosenberg, LCSW-R, a New York City–based therapist and a long-term HIV survivor. “The anticipation of that creates so much anxiety that many people don’t even go to their families.” Formerly known as Scott Kramer, Rosenberg recently took on his husband’s last name.

On the flip side, those who are homebound and/or have few family members or friends might find this time of year lonelier and more depressing than usual. “Loneliness and isolation can be huge factors during the holidays,” says Rosenberg. Of course, the holidays are joyous and gratifying times for many people, including those living with HIV. But for those who struggle during this season, here are some tips to help you cope.

**The most important thing to remember is that you have options:** You’re no longer a kid with no choice but to spend the day bored out of your mind at Aunt Sally’s. While what you tell people may take some finessing, you can do whatever you want. “If you decide you don’t have a certain holiday obligation in you this year, then plan a little trip or stay home instead,” says Rosenberg. “Tell people that you need to help a friend who just had surgery or whatever little white lie you need to tell.” There’s no better way to relieve event dread than to remind yourself that you’re not locked in. To paraphrase Beyoncé, you’re a grown person...you can do whatever you want!

## Celebrate Friendsgiving, Friendsnukkah

**or Friendsmas instead.** Many folks find comfort in spending key holidays—those days society says you’re supposed to spend with others—with their friends, or “chosen family,” rather than their biological family. Assuming your friends live nearby and your family doesn’t, this can also eliminate a lot of travel expense, time and stress. “I usually have my clients make a list on paper of the pros and cons of going to family versus friends,” says Rosenberg. “That really helps clarify the choice.”

**But what if you really want to see biological family or feel like you should?**



Maybe you’ve decided that after three holiday seasons staying in town with friends, it’s time to see your “biofam,” despite the anxieties and hassles that may present. Rosenberg recommends setting up guardrails when you visit. “You can take a friend with you as a buffer, you can agree to talk or text throughout the day with a friend as a coping mechanism or you can make it clear in advance that you can only stop by for an hour or so—maybe for dessert.” You can even politely request in advance that politics aren’t discussed. If Uncle Hal insists on bringing it up, you can simply say, “I came today to

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catch up with family, not to discuss politics.” That should shut it down—and if it doesn’t, you’re free to walk away.

**You don’t have to put your whole life out there for discussion.** Even if you prioritize being out loud and proud about your LGBTQ and/or HIV status in the rest of your life, you don’t have to reveal, announce or otherwise mention those aspects of yourself with family—especially perhaps with family you’re not particularly close to—if you don’t want to.

On the other hand, notes Rosenberg, “you might feel strength or empowerment in bringing up aspects of your identity. Research shows that these are often teachable moments.” Just keep in mind that the response you get might not necessarily be the one you want, such as a relative abruptly changing the subject or wandering away when you bring up something having to do with LGBTQ and/or HIV. The point is: how much you reveal of yourself and your beliefs at holiday family meetups is up to you.

**What if you’re looking at being alone on a holiday?** First, says Rosenberg, ask yourself how you really feel about it. If you think you’ll be fine with it, it’s perfectly OK to spend a holiday alone. (More on that later.) But if you feel a real yearning for company, reach out to friends, acquaintances or neighbors to see what they’re up to, offering (if you’re willing and able) to host them at your place or to bring food to—or help cook and clean up—at theirs. Or you can suggest you all go out to dinner or a movie or both.

And if you don’t have folks you can spend the day with, see if your local AIDS services organization has anything planned, or go online and search “holiday gathering options” by city or region to see what’s available to you. Volunteering—such as helping serve a holiday meal at a nonprofit or charity—is a wonderful way to overcome your isolation on a holiday and experience a sense of purpose and connection to your community. And who knows what new friends you might make or interests you might cultivate?

Also, says Rosenberg, “Think about who else you know who might be alone—they might just want to talk on the phone.” If you feel truly alone and despairing, he reminds, you can always call a 24/7 hotline like Samaritans just to talk to someone. Also, there are myriad ways to connect online with other folks with HIV nationwide, such as The Reunion Project and Positive Women’s Network. If you connect with such groups in advance, they can be a great way to help you find other people living with HIV in your area that you might be able to get together with in person.

**All that said, remember that it’s perfectly fine to be alone on a holiday.** “There’s so much pressure we put on ourselves” to make a holiday a big deal, and “that’s really not fair to ourselves,” says Rosenberg, adding that you may simply want to cuddle up on your couch for the day and watch your favorite movies or TV shows, make yourself a nice meal, take a long bath, go for a run or to the gym—or simply not even get out of bed. “Do whatever you want to do that’ll make you feel good,” he says. After all, each holiday is basically only one day.

**Whatever you do, be good to yourself.** “We all know internally what is best for us, even if we don’t follow that inner voice,” says Rosenberg. The most important thing, he adds, is that, rather than go down a wormhole of depression, self-recrimination and other bad feelings over the holidays, “we have to treat ourselves with kindness, compassion and love.” Perhaps even more so than usual because this is the time of year when we are most vulnerable to cultural ideas about what we should be doing, which isn’t necessarily the same thing as what’s most nurturing.

So if you’re looking forward to the holidays, great! But if you’re not, just remember that January is right around the bend!

Scott Rosenberg is also involved with Positive Alliance, a New York City–based social and support group (including holiday events) that is primarily for gay and bi men living with HIV, but welcomes anyone.

## **ART+ Gallery Exhibit December 2nd – 28th**

In partnership with The Stephen Baumbach Gallery in the Backstreet Arts District, we are happy to have curated this special month-long exhibit of art produced by artists creating and thriving with HIV.

## **HIV+ Village Palm Springs and Coachella Valley**

As a result of a former research study that HARP-PS conducted in partnership with three major universities, regarding cognition in the face of isolation, we launched this Facebook Group as a test in March. Under the guidance of Jim Ferguson, the group has grown to 130 members so far, providing research opportunities and updates, important information about vaccines, and personal connections between member through a growing social activity calendar.

## **What else is coming?**

In addition to hosting our 2nd Annual Women's Conference, and our 10th Annual Positively Aging Project in 2025, we are introducing a new "Self-Advocating for Your Healthcare" program in April and are expanding our Positive Life Series into the Eastern Coachella Valley.

We also had a little fun along the way and raised important funds for HARP-PS! On a sunny day in March, we held our First Annual Silent Auction at the beautiful home of former HARP-PS Chair, Paul Kowal, who also generously donated the catering for the day (stay tuned for the next one in 2025!) In November we had our "2nd Annual Big Gay Tupperware Party" hosted by the talented, generous and hysterical, Ethylina Canne at 111 Bar where we all learned how to keep things fresh by "burping our tops" while also raffling off some great gifts from V Wine Lounge, Le Vallauris, Men's Grooming Spot and many others. In December we will have open our four day "Double Good" pop-up gourmet popcorn shop. Last years' sale proved to bring out the competitive spirit in all our board members – especially a certain doctor, who shall remain unnamed, until he isn't. We're talking about you Doctor Adams, who wiped the floor with the rest of us and personally sold over \$1000 – 50% of which went to support HARP-PS.

Also look out for our Dance Party at Toucan's in January AND our 1st Drag Bingo Event, once again, hosted by the lovely Ethylina Canne at Roost Bar in May.

Thanks to everyone that has supported the HIV+ Aging Research Project over this year. A very special thanks to our volunteers and Ken Vergonet, Scott Graf, Mike Hartley, and our volunteer photographer, the talented Chad Sain. Your work throughout the year makes a difference and we truly could not do this without you. I'd also like to thank my partners in crime, Jim Ferguson, Christopher Christensen, and, of course, Jeff Taylor as well as a special thanks to our entire board, Carlos Martinez, Bridgette Picou, Brian Fickel, James Adams, Ted Guice, Steve Rossetti, and Jack Bunting for your service and commitment throughout the year. It is an honor to work alongside every one of you.

So, when setting your goals this year, give up on pie-in-the-sky resolutions and please consider joining our fight, our journey, to advocate for, and educate those aging with HIV – as well as getting the word out to our community at large. The fight is not over.

Wishing you many blessings in the New Year and thank you again for being part of making HARP-PS what it is today and strives to be in the future.

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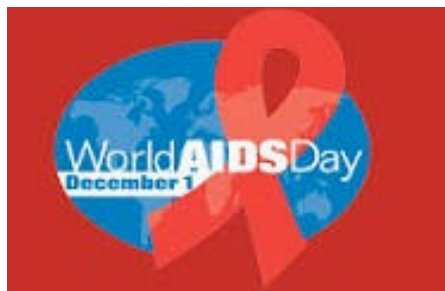
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# Upcoming Events



**DECEMBER 1, 2024**  
11:00 - 3:00 PM  
**WORLD AIDS DAY**  
**Timothy Ray Brown**  
**Symposium**  
**PALM SPRINGS ART**  
**MUSEUM**



**DECEMBER 2ND - 28TH**  
11:00-3:00 PM  
Stephen Baumbach Gallery  
4116 Matthew Dr, Palm  
Springs, CA 92264



**JANUARY 14th, 2025**  
6:00 PM  
Managing Prostate Disease in HIV  
Jay Bishoff, MD



## Resources

**Your California Digital Vaccination Record**



**Free Daily Meals**  
Meals on Wheels

**Food Pantries**



**Riverside County Assistance Programs**  
Food Assistance  
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**Utility Assistance Programs**  
Water  
Energy



**Healthy Recipes**  
Soups  
Main Dishes  
Salads  
& More



## ***A Very Special Thank You To Our Volunteers!***

*Jim Ferguson – Program Director - HIV+ Village PS, and Layout of Newsletter*  
*Christopher Christensen - Program Director RID and Positive Life Series Volunteer*  
*Ken Vergonet – Volunteer Social Media Manager*  
*Chad Sain – Volunteer Photographer (Chad Sain Photography)*  
*Scott Graf - Events Volunteer*  
*Mike Hartley - Events Volunteer*