

# INTERSECTIONS AT THE GRASSROOTS

A REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE ANALYSIS OF ATLANTA'S HIV EPIDEMIC

## KEY FINDINGS

### ATLANTA: THE EPICENTER OF THE HIV EPIDEMIC IN THE US SOUTH

NINE STATES IN THE DEEP SOUTH MAKE UP 28% OF THE OVERALL US POPULATION, YET ACCOUNT FOR 40% OF ALL NEW HIV DIAGNOSES NATIONWIDE.<sup>i</sup>

- ❖ The prevalence of HIV in Georgia and the US South is substantially higher than in the rest of the United States. Georgia currently ranks fifth in the nation for the number of new HIV diagnoses.<sup>ii</sup> In

2013, Georgia

reported over 3,000 new HIV diagnoses; young adults between the ages of 13-24 accounted for approximately 23% of those diagnoses.<sup>iii</sup>

- ❖ Given the pervasiveness of HIV within Georgia's most densely populated communities, it is estimated that **1 in 51 Georgians** are at risk of contracting HIV in their lifetime.<sup>iv</sup>

MORE THAN ONE-QUARTER OF ALL GEORGIANS LIVING WITH HIV ARE UNAWARE OF THEIR STATUS.

- ❖ In Georgia, the rate of persons who are aware of their HIV-positive status (73%) is lower than the national average (87%).<sup>v</sup> Being aware of one's status is essential to obtaining timely treatment and care, which can significantly increase a person's chances of viral suppression and positive health outcomes.

*"The South is the epicenter of the [HIV] epidemic and really Atlanta is the epicenter of that."*

- Nic Carlisle, Executive Director of the Southern AIDS Coalition

- ❖ In 2014, it was found that ***one in two new HIV diagnoses in the Atlanta area had already progressed to AIDS***—indicating that the person diagnosed had been unknowingly living with HIV and without adequate treatment for at least one year.<sup>vi</sup>

#### FULTON COUNTY ACCOUNTS FOR HALF OF HIV CASES IN THE STATE.

- ❖ The majority of these new cases occur among young Black men and Black women across the spectrum of gender and sexuality. Young Black gay men over 18 in metro Atlanta have a 60% chance of contracting HIV by age 30.<sup>vii</sup>
- ❖ Approximately ***64% of people in the state of Georgia living with HIV reside in the Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Marietta Metropolitan Statistical Area*** (MSA).<sup>viii</sup> Within the Atlanta metropolitan area, the most densely populated counties (Fulton, Dekalb, and Clayton, respectively) have new diagnoses rates exceeding the rest of the state.

#### CALL TO ACTION

SisterLove calls for greater attention to the social determinants of health and the longer standing forces of economic inequity that drive poverty and create our to sexual health landscape. We acknowledge the burgeoning research demonstrating that structural factors—rather than individual “risky” behaviors—drive our ongoing epidemic among the most impacted groups, and we encourage further research and attention to policies that address these structural factors. We broadly affirm the following recommendations:

- ❖ **INCREASE** HIV initiatives that explicitly address the Social Determinants of Health.
- ❖ **MONITOR AND ASSESS** local land use and economic policies, and amend or reject those that fail to address the needs and impacts upon neighborhoods that bear a disproportionate burden of HIV and other health disparities.
- ❖ **ENSURE ACCESS** to the full range of biomedical HIV prevention and treatment technologies, research, and healthcare to advance the health of women impacted by HIV.

- ❖ **PROVIDE** young people with medically accurate, evidence based, non-stigmatizing CSE and related resources, and improve leave policies and support resources for young parents.
- ❖ **END DISCRIMINATION** against PLHIV under Georgia's criminal law.

With these recommendations, we urge local and state elected officials, in conjunction with community stakeholders to implement expeditiously policies and laws that will make for a more equitable, just, and fair state.

## WHO ARE WE?

Headquartered in Atlanta, GA, and with offices in South Africa, SisterLove, Inc.'s (SLI) mission is to eradicate the impact of HIV and sexual and reproductive oppression upon all women, their families, and communities locally and internationally. Established in 1989, SLI was the first organization in the US South to explicitly focus on the needs of Black women living with HIV (WLHIV) and other communities disproportionately impacted and least recognized in direct services, research, and advocacy in the HIV epidemic. We see Reproductive Justice (RJ) as the conditions of liberation that will exist when all people have the power and resources necessary to make their own decisions about their bodies, gender, sexuality, relationships, families, and communities, to create and choose their families, and to reproduce their communities as a whole – all with dignity, self-determination, and genuine support.

<sup>i</sup> Southern HIV/AIDS Strategy Initiative (2016) *HIV/AIDS in the U.S. Deep South: Trends from 2008-2013*. Available at: <https://southernaids.files.wordpress.com/2011/10/hiv-aids-in-the-us-deep-south-trends-from-2008-2013.pdf>.

<sup>ii</sup> Southern HIV/AIDS Strategy Initiative (2016) *HIV/AIDS in the U.S. Deep South: Trends from 2008-2013*. Available at: <https://southernaids.files.wordpress.com/2011/10/hiv-aids-in-the-us-deep-south-trends-from-2008-2013.pdf>.

<sup>iii</sup> AIDSvu (2016) *Georgia*. Available at: <http://aidsvu.org/state/georgia/>; see also, Georgia Department of Public Health, *HIV/AIDS Epidemiology Section Epidemiology Program*. Available at: [https://dph.georgia.gov/sites/dph.georgia.gov/files/HIV\\_EPI\\_2013\\_Surveillance\\_Summary.pdf](https://dph.georgia.gov/sites/dph.georgia.gov/files/HIV_EPI_2013_Surveillance_Summary.pdf).

<sup>iv</sup> US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2016) *Lifetime Risk of HIV Diagnosis*. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchhstp/newsroom/2016/croi-press-release-risk.html>.

<sup>v</sup> Georgia Department of Public Health, *HIV/AIDS Epidemiology Section Epidemiology Program*. Available at: [https://dph.georgia.gov/sites/dph.georgia.gov/files/HIV\\_EPI\\_2013\\_Surveillance\\_Summary.pdf](https://dph.georgia.gov/sites/dph.georgia.gov/files/HIV_EPI_2013_Surveillance_Summary.pdf).

<sup>vi</sup> Hagen, L. (2015) *Half of Atlanta's Newly Diagnosed HIV Patients Have AIDS, Grady Testing Finds*. Available at: <http://news.wabe.org/post/half-atlantas-newly-diagnosed-hiv-patients-have-aids-grady-testing-finds>.

<sup>vii</sup> Sullivan, P., et al. (2015). Explaining racial disparities in HIV incidence in black and white men who have sex with men in Atlanta, GA: A prospective observational cohort study. *Annals of epidemiology*, 25(6), 445f epidemiology.015). Available at: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25911980>.

<sup>viii</sup> Georgia Department of Public Health (2016) *HIV/AIDS Epidemiology Section HIV Surveillance Summary, Georgia 2014*, Available at: <https://dph.georgia.gov/data-fact-sheet-summaries>.