June 29, 2014 - Governor Andrew Cuomo announced a three-point plan to “bend the curve” and decrease new HIV infections to the point where the number of people living with HIV in New York State is reduced for the first time. The end of the AIDS epidemic in New York will occur when the total number of new HIV infections has fallen below the number of HIV-related deaths. Governor Cuomo and the New York State Department of Health believe that’s possible by 2020.

“Thirty years ago, New York was the epicenter of the AIDS crisis -- today I am proud to announce that we are in a position to be the first state in the nation committed to ending this epidemic,” said Governor Cuomo. “New York State has reached an important milestone in controlling the AIDS epidemic, and through this comprehensive strategy, we are decreasing new HIV infections to the point where by 2020, the number of persons living with HIV in New York State will be reduced for the first time.”

“...we are in a position to be the first state in the nation committed to ending this epidemic.”

On June 5, 1981 an item from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) made note of “a ‘mysterious illness’ affecting young homosexual men in New York City and California.” Within months the number of Americans with the illness had multiplied; within a year the CDC gave it an official name - Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome – AIDS. The CDC’s small “mysterious illness” item became the lead story on news broadcasts, the cover story on magazines, and the subject of millions of headlines.

An AIDS diagnosis was a death sentence then, and a painful, ugly way to die. A new form of segregation emerged; instead of neighbors reaching out to help those afflicted with AIDS, they shunned them and blamed the victims for bringing the disease on themselves. It wasn’t until Indiana teenager Ryan White got AIDS from a blood transfusion that the tide began to turn. AIDS was now a disease anyone could get and if we were to be safe, we had to fight it together.

Just two years into the crisis, in 1983, Governor Mario Cuomo made New York State a national leader in response to the AIDS crisis. He set up 14 regional Community Service Providers (CSPs) to give information and referrals for AIDS patients and families in every county of the state. For three decades New York has provided support services and medication for those with AIDS, and invested heavily in preventing the spread of HIV.

ACR Health is one of the original 14 Community Service Providers and, with more than three decades of experience under our belts, we’re primed for the fight that will bring about the End of AIDS, as Governor Andrew Cuomo takes the fight to a whole new level, by bending the curve.

Story continues on page 3

Serving Cayuga, Herkimer, Jefferson, Lewis, Madison, Oneida, Onondaga, Oswego, and St. Lawrence Counties
ACR Health has named Randy André and Jaime Latonis as Assistant Directors of Prevention to help lead ACR Health’s growing and diversifying Prevention Department.

As Assistant Director of Prevention for Community Initiatives, Randy André has experience in military leadership and as a public school educator. He has dedicated the majority of his adult life to public service and community improvement. A native of Lewis County, Randy has served with numerous community based human services organizations in New York, Florida, Kentucky, and in Central America.

Mr. André supervises the Communities of Color MSM program to prevent HIV and STD infections in gay and bisexual men; the Women’s Initiative, a health education and risk reduction service for women; and the Criminal Justice Initiative, which provides comprehensive HIV, STD, and Hepatitis prevention programs to New York State inmates in eight correctional facilities.

As Assistant Director of Prevention for Harm Reduction Services, Jaime Latonis has experience in the military and is a retired Law Enforcement Officer with 18 years of service, having served as Commander of the Northeast Georgia Narcotics Task Force. A native of Phoenix, Arizona, Jaime and his wife relocated to Syracuse for her work with the FDA.

Mr. Latonis supervises the Syringe Exchange Program, which provides clean syringes to injection drug users to reduce the number of HIV and Hepatitis C infections; ESAP, a syringe voucher program; Narcan training, a program for the public on how to use the antidote for heroin overdoses; and the Communities of Color Heterosexual program, to prevent HIV, STD, and Hepatitis C infections in minority communities.

“Increasing management capacity in key service areas, such as syringe exchange and the agency’s testing programs, will directly support the newest policies which the Center for Disease Control and Prevention calls High Impact Prevention,” said Director of Prevention, Erin Bortel. “I am confident that Randy and Jaime will greatly support the future success of this department and the organization.”

ACR Health’s Prevention Department has 26 positions spread over nine programs, all working to prevent the spread of HIV, Hepatitis C, and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Our Mission...

The Mission of ACR Health is three-fold:

- To provide support services to those who are living with chronic diseases, including HIV/AIDS.
- To prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV.
- To promote sexual literacy and improved medical outcomes.
K. Daniel Reed is a Senior Prevention Health Advocate with ACR Health’s MENS Project, a program to prevent the spread of HIV, Hepatitis C, and other sexually transmitted diseases among adult African American and Latino men who have sex with men. That target population is key to ending AIDS because in a one month period last year, Daniel tested four men who turned out to be HIV positive. All were African-American men and between the ages of 21 and 30. “It was disheartening for me because it only confirms the fact that our young black men who have sex with men are still the most affected by HIV/AIDS.”

Daniel was alone with each of the men when preliminary results came through. Each of them reacted differently to the life altering news. “The first gentleman knew that he’d been exposed and was possibly infected. When I delivered the results there was little emotion but LOTS of questions about doctors, viral loads, CD4 counts, medication, and insurance.”

The second young man was very distraught because his partner had lied to him about his HIV status. Also, the client felt that he’d placed another at risk because, during a night of heavy drinking, he and his best friend engaged in sex without a condom. “He thought his life was over,” said Daniel. “He thought he wouldn’t be able to achieve his dreams because he now has HIV.”

Because of the young man’s dark thoughts, Daniel stayed with him as long as necessary to assure him that HIV is no longer a death sentence. There are medical treatments to keep the virus under control and Care Managers at ACR Health to guide his care.

The third young man was not surprised with the HIV diagnosis, but he did start crying because he was scared of telling his family. After assuring and reassuring the client that he didn’t have to tell anyone he isn’t comfortable telling, the client left Daniel’s office with a smile on his face.

“The fourth did not show any emotion at all in response to the reactive result. He actually started to be agitated that I was asking so many questions, checking in, and trying to connect him to the other services we offer that he was now qualified to receive,” said Daniel.

Daniel works one-on-one with people being tested for HIV, educating and counseling so they know more about how to stay HIV free if they are not already infected. “They all leave knowing they can access me for anything, and I will do my best to deliver.”

Another one of Daniel’s main objectives is to talk about safe sex as an individual with HIV. Once clients hear that they are HIV positive they immediately say they’re no longer having sex, mainly because they feel that they cannot trust partners and potential partners anymore. However, my message is always, “You’re going to want to have sex again at some point, and that’s perfectly normal, in fact, encouraged. So, here’s how you can do it, enjoy it, and keep both you and your partner safe.”

ACR Health provides free and confidential testing services at its Syracuse, Watertown, and Utica offices and at designated locations in the community every month. ACR Health tests for HIV, Hepatitis C, Chlamydia, and Gonorrhea. To learn more, or to request an appointment, email us at information@acrhealth.org or call us at 800.475.2430.
We did it! With the help of 167 angelic friends

ACR Health Development Department set a lofty goal last year to expand the Holiday Angel program to include new “Health Home” clients, those who receive Care Management, but are not HIV+. When the dust settled and the last gifts were delivered, we counted 429 ACR Health consumers served. Thank you for caring and sharing with our families!
Creating Safer Schools for Transgender Students

The Q Center sponsored a first-of-its-kind workshop late last year, funded in part by the Central New York Community Foundation, for Central New York educators and service providers on the topic of: Creating Supportive Schools for Transgender Students: A Review of Best Practices.

“This workshop was our effort to close the often harmful gap in knowledge and understanding surrounding how to support and communicate successfully with transgender students,” said ACR Youth Services Director Marissa Rice. “The best way to be an ally is to understand that each student is an individual and an expert on their own lives. Listen and take your cues from them.”

Karen Fuller, co-founder of the TransParent Support Group, said the best received workshop presentation was a youth panel discussion with six Q Center regulars: Gabe, Kahleah, Katherine, Caitlyn, Shane, and Carter. “Not only do they have the typical struggles of school (grades, testing, and homework),” said Karen, “these students have the added pressure of trying to live as they truly are and navigating their way through the day without being called out or bullied.” Karen was proud that Gabe, a Q Center youth spoke out at the workshop.

“‘I am a real active kid and have a lot of friends,’” said Gabe. “‘When I am walking to gym class with a bunch of kids and I split off from them to go to the nurse’s office to change they are going to wonder what I am doing. I shouldn’t have to make up a lie, I should just be able to go change with the guys.”

Having support of the school administrators made all the difference for Shane. “If it wasn’t for the principal supporting me when I first transitioned I don’t think I would still be in school today.”

For Kahleah it was the opposite. “The teacher made things harder, either by not using my preferred name or pronoun or by questioning me in front of other students.”

Katherine, like Shane, went to a supportive school. “It made transition easier and I was able to concentrate on schoolwork. I’m looking forward to graduating this year and attending college in the fall.”

As the mother of a Trans student, Karen knows how important it is for schools to understand the challenges these students have and realize that school may be the only place that they can get support and acceptance, especially for those who come from families that do not accept their gender identity. This was true especially for Gabe who, when he first came out as trans, did not have any support at home and depended on his guidance counselors. “If it wasn’t for them,” said Gabe, “I wouldn’t be here today. Knowing that I had a place I could go and be accepted and understood instead of being treated as a deviant who was just trying to cause problems, like I was at home, kept me going. School was the only place I could get some relief from what I was going through at home.”

Karen Fuller, Parent of transgender child

Karen Fuller
Parent of transgender child

Marissa Rice
Director of Youth Services

Karen Fuller
Parent of transgender child

Karen Fuller
Director of Youth Services

• 90% of transgender students report being verbally harassed
• 53% report physical harassment
• 65% report sexual harassment
For more than a decade, Empower Federal Credit Union has been a proud and loyal sponsor of ACR Health. Empower is the presenting sponsor of the AIDS Hike for Life in the Mohawk Valley, the AIDS Walk/Run in Central New York, and the First Frost AIDS Walk/Run in Watertown. These events support emergency client needs and supply the financial foundation for ACR Health’s extensive youth education and prevention programs offered throughout our nine-county service area.

While lawmakers from every level of government express concerns about youth health and safety, youth program grants are rare. Empower is a driving force that helps us fill the gap in youth services; we raise tens of thousands of dollars each year to keep the Adolescent Health Initiative, the Q Center in Syracuse, Q2 in Utica, and LGBTQ programs in all counties viable and effective. Hats off to you, John Wakefield, Empower President and CEO, for investing in us and in the youth we serve.

It may look as though these party-goers are just having a good time, and they are, but they have a bigger mission – to sustain and support the Q Center and the community of young lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth who use it.

The Greenwood Winery and Bistro in East Syracuse opened its doors to this packed house on Sunday, January 18, for a Wine and “CharQuterie” Giving Party.

There were many new faces in the crowd, delighting Maureen Harrington O’Neill, Q Center Associate Development Director, who loves to tell new people about the Q Center. “The Q is a place – for many youth the only place – where they can be themselves. Where they can get support from caring adults,” said Maureen. “For some of our homeless youth, we are the only home they have to come to.” Last year, 200 youth took advantage of afterschool programming and free tutoring at the Q Center; four scholarships were awarded to college-bound youth; and those are just a couple of many, many services we offer.

ACR Health receives support from the United Way of Central New York, the Onondaga County Youth Bureau, and OnCare. Giving Parties like the Wine and “CharQuterie” affair help fill in the Q Center funding gap. Would you like to host a Giving Party? The Q Committee will help make yours a success. Contact Maureen at events@ACRHealth.org.
Important Information About Health Insurance

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) became law on **March 23, 2010**. The law has been implemented over a number of years, as different aspects of ACA become effective. Full implementation will be completed in 2015.

What you need to know right now:

- You have until **February 15, 2015** to acquire health insurance and avoid penalties on your 2015 federal income taxes
- Form 1095-A is a new federal tax form issued by state marketplaces for consumers to use when filing their federal tax return. New York sent out more than 300,000 forms in January to addresses that had one or more family members enrolled in a qualified health plan through the marketplace at any point during 2014.

ACR Health has navigators in every county. Call 800.475.2430 to sign up for insurance assistance. Don’t delay. The deadline to enroll is February 15.

In the North County...
Navigators stay with you until the job is done

For Navigator Brandy Snyder, enrolling Tammy and her husband in a qualified health plan was straightforward and problem free. The following month Tammy’s husband was diagnosed with cancer and admitted to the hospital. “Her insurance had some hiccups because of overlapping payment issues and so she came back to me in a panic because the hospital said he did not have coverage,” said Brandy. After working diligently with the insurance company for weeks Brandy finally got his coverage back dated, so his hospital care was covered. First problem solved.

Tammy’s husband’s convalescence dragged on, and after several months he was still unable to return to work. “Again, she came to me upset because they could not afford their insurance any longer.” But her husband obviously needed to keep health insurance. Brandy re-ran the health insurance application with updated financial information and Tammy and her husband had become eligible for Medicaid.”

Circumstances change and it is important to remember that you have a strong advocate at ACR Health who can help you find the most affordable coverage, and work with multiple organizations to assure you that you are receiving the best healthcare possible. Staff in ACR Health’s Community Health Advocates Program are experts on how to manage insurance issues, denials and how to find the best possible deal on your healthcare needs.

“The 1095-A form is new this year and we are here to help you understand these new forms,” said Steve Wood, Assistant Director of Support Services, Insurance Programs. “As with any new process, we expect that consumers will have questions and, in some cases, adjustments. ACR Health Navigators can assist with this process. “

Steve Wood

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Brandy Snyder, left, and Tammy

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ACR Health offers its services to anyone without discrimination based on age, race, creed, color, gender, sexual orientation, economic status, political affiliation, marital status, handicapped status, or mode of transmission.

ACR Health is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Follow us on:

**UPCOMING EVENTS**

**February 15, 2015**
Dessert Reception and Performance of *In the Next Room* by Sarah Ruhl.
Reception at 1:00 p.m.; performance at 2:00 p.m. at Syracuse Stage.
Tickets are $30-$50 for the afternoon; $20 for reception only.
Call 475.2430 for tickets or online at ACRHealth.org

**February 15, 2015**
Upstate Drag Show
Campus Activity Building, 155 Elizabeth Blackwell Street, Syracuse.
Tickets $10, call 464.8860. 7:30 p.m. Show starts at 8:15.

**March 15, 2015**
Chili Cook Off
Taste test a variety of chili and baked goods. 1:00-3:00 p.m., $20 to enter, $8 to sample
Conifer Village, Baldwinsville. events@ACRHealth.org

**March 19, 2015**
Eddie Fund Fundraiser to benefit Q Center scholarships, & general fund
5:30 p.m. Laci’s Tapas Bar, 304 Hawley Avenue, Syracuse

**March 24, 2015**
Dirty T-Shirt Party
5:00-7:00 p.m. AI’s Wine and Whiskey Lounge, 321 South Clinton, Syracuse
Suggested donation $5. events@ACRHealth.org

**April 12, 2015**
BLOWOUT “Vegas” Fantasy Hair Competition
6:30-9:30 p.m. at the Landmark Theatre in Syracuse. events@ACRHealth.org

**April 19, 2015**
Beer Bingo
Dinosaur Barbeque 6:00 p.m. Tickets $20. events@ACRHealth.org

**April 25, 2015**
17th Annual AIDS Hike for Life with Bubbles!
5K fundraising walk and timed run at 11:00 a.m. at Hamilton College.
Something new this year – optional BUBBLES courtesy of the Bubble Blast Run!
AIDSwalkCNY.com

**May 8, 2015**
Red Solo Cup Party
5:00 p.m. Toby Keith’s I Love This Bar and Grill
Tickets $15 and $50. events@ACRHealth.org

**June 7, 2015**
23rd Annual AIDS Walk/Run
10:00 a.m. 5K fundraising walk, 10K timed run at Beaver Lake Nature Center.
AIDSwalkCNY.com

**COMMUNITY EDUCATION FORUMS**

Forums provide HIV education to community members and those interested in becoming volunteers. Events are held monthly in Syracuse and Utica. Call 800.475.2430 to sign up.

**LGBTQ YOUTH SUPPORT GROUPS**

ACR Health has numerous support group meetings in Syracuse, Utica, Watertown, and the Mohawk Valley. Participants are grouped by ages from 8-26.

**The Q Center for a full listing**

Syracuse youth group meetings are at the Q Center,
617 West Genesee Street
Information: 315.701.2431 or qcenter@ACRHealth.org

Mohawk Valley LGBTQ Youth Groups
Information: 315.701.2422

Utica LGBTQ Youth Groups
Information: 315.701.2422 or glbtqyouth@ACRHealth.org

Watertown Area Gay Youth
Information: 315.386.4493 x 151

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If you wish to unsubscribe from this newsletter: information@ACRHealth.org or 800.475.2430.