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of NORTH CAROLINA
at CHAPEL HILL



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Center for AIDS Research

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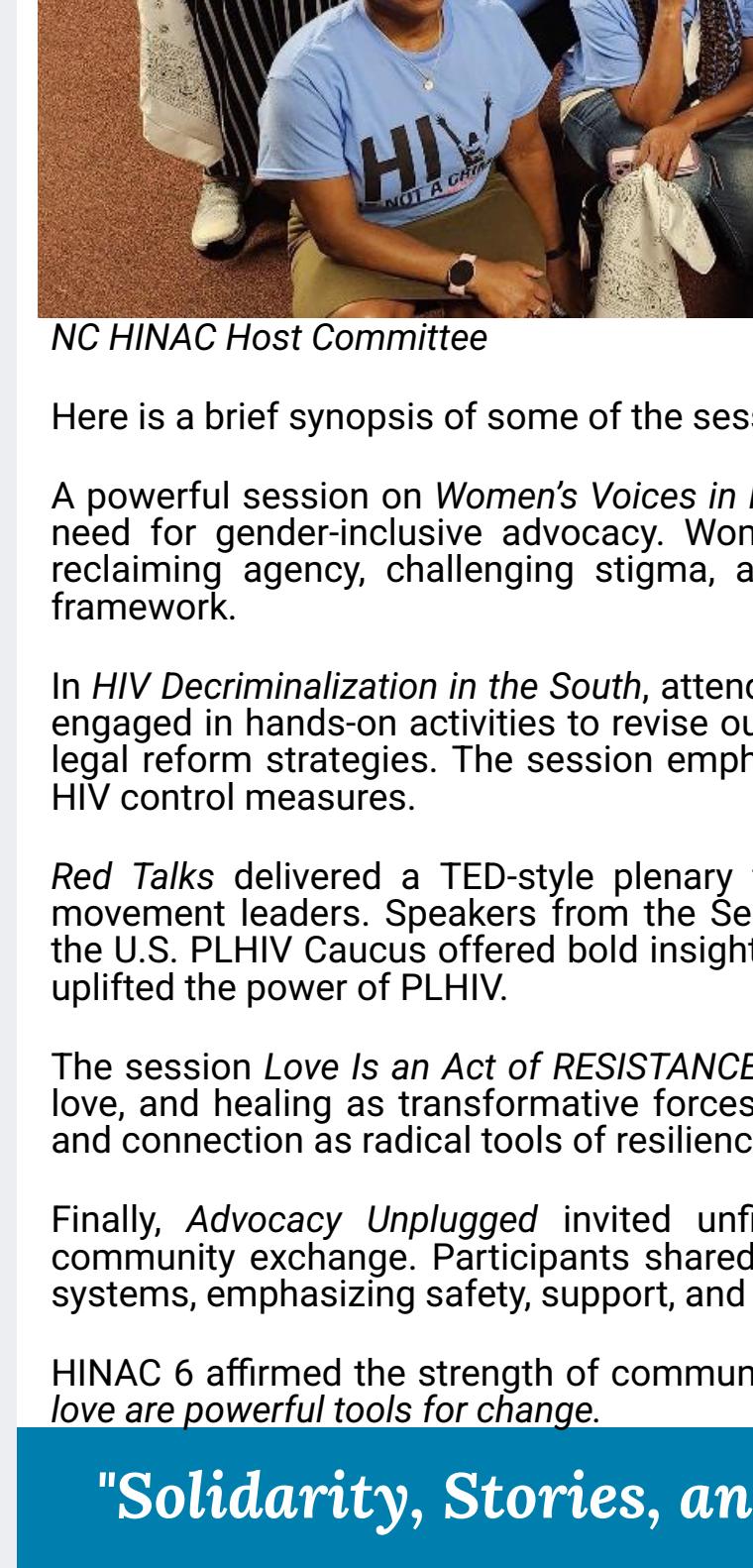
NEWS LETTER | July 2025

Third Edition



Elevating Community Engagement

HINAC 6 – Advancing Advocacy, Reclaiming Power



By Alicia Diggs CFAR OCE Manager

The 6th *HIV Is Not a Crime National Training Academy* (HINAC) brought together advocates, policy leaders, and people living with HIV (PLHIV) to advance justice through decriminalization, healing, and empowerment. Held biennially, HINAC centers PLHIV leadership and unites communities to combat HIV criminalization, mass incarceration, racism, and social injustice.

It was a true honor to serve as a North Carolina Host Committee Co-Chair alongside Judith Montenegro of *Latinos in the Deep South*. Together with our incredible team, we embraced the opportunity with passion, pride, and joy—earning the title (if not officially) of *Best HINAC Host Committee Ever!* From start to finish, the energy, creativity, and collaboration of the host team helped make this gathering unforgettable.

Alicia Diggs and Judith Montenegro



Here is a brief synopsis of some of the sessions.

A powerful session on *Women's Voices in HIV Modernization and Decriminalization Advocacy* highlighted the need for gender-inclusive advocacy. Women living with HIV shared personal stories and strategies for reclaiming agency, challenging stigma, and promoting meaningful involvement within a gender justice framework.

In *HIV Decriminalization in the South*, attendees took a deep dive into North Carolina's HIV laws. Participants engaged in hands-on activities to revise outdated policies, identify stigma-reinforcing language, and explore legal reform strategies. The session emphasized building legislative and community support to modernize HIV control measures.

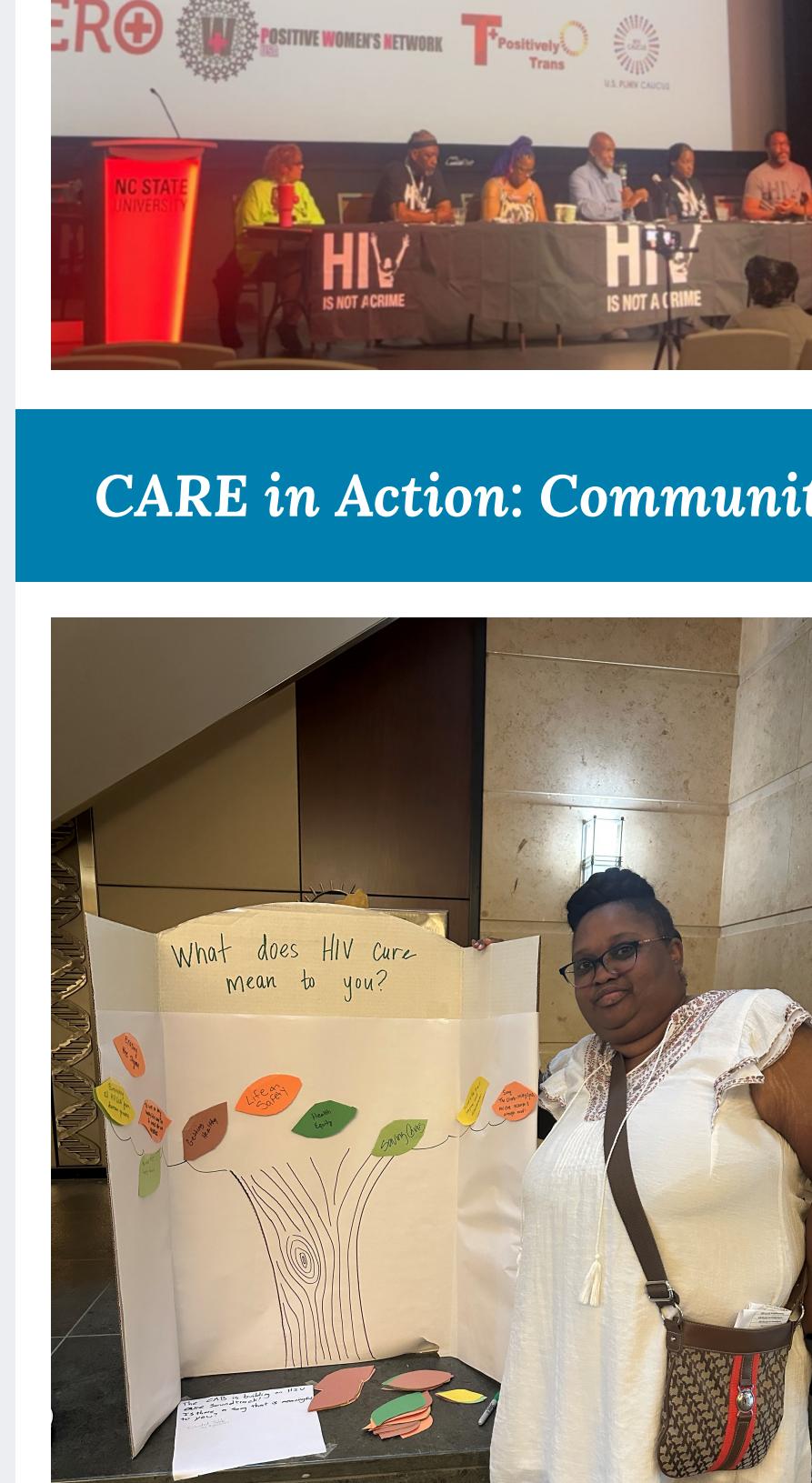
Red Talks delivered a TED-style plenary filled with visionary ideas and lived experiences from national movement leaders. Speakers from the Sero Project, Positive Women's Network-USA, Positively Trans, and the U.S. PLHIV Caucus offered bold insights and calls to action that challenged systems of punishment and uplifted the power of PLHIV.

The session *Love Is an Act of RESISTANCE* led by the Black United Leadership Initiative (BULI) explored joy, love, and healing as transformative forces for justice. Participants experienced a "Love Call," centering joy and connection as radical tools of resilience and resistance.

Finally, *Advocacy Unplugged* invited unfiltered truth and grassroots strategy into a bold, interactive community exchange. Participants shared real-time reflections on surviving and thriving under oppressive systems, emphasizing safety, support, and collective courage in the fight for decriminalization.

HINAC 6 affirmed the strength of community-led advocacy and reminded us: *our voices, our stories, and our love are powerful tools for change.*

"Solidarity, Stories, and Systems Change: Reflections from HINAC6"



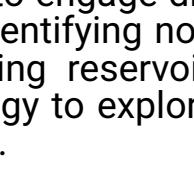
By Adjaratou Elvira Diouf

The HIV Is Not A Crime 6 (HINAC6) Training Academy was a fun, interactive, and highly educational experience! One I'm incredibly grateful to have been given the opportunity to be a part of. The atmosphere felt like a summer camp in the best way possible, as it was both well-organized and refreshingly low-pressure.

Before attending, I had no idea what HIV criminalization was, and being in a space where individuals directly impacted by it could share raw, uncensored stories was eye-opening. It highlighted how systemic oppression continues to hinder progress for those already struggling.

As a West African, I've always understood the power of policies in advancing health initiatives, particularly when it comes to funding. However, I never considered how this same power could lead to health inequities. This conference gave me a newfound interest in the intersection of legal systems, health, and social determinants, especially since many West African countries are currently grappling with subtle forms of dictatorship, which can shape the trajectory of both health policies and personal freedoms.

What stood out most was how intentional and visionary organizers were, as they fostered a space rooted in solidarity, healing, and a shared commitment to dismantling oppressive systems. As a recent college graduate and aspiring global health researcher, I've always been drawn to infectious diseases; but HINAC6 offered a broader perspective. It opened my eyes to new areas of focus, like HIV criminalization, and helped me see how my passion for infectious disease research can intersect with advocacy and policy work. I'm deeply thankful to have participated both as a volunteer and an attendee, and I'm already looking forward to joining the HINAC community again in future.



From HIV Speaks on Jones Street to The HIV is Not a Crime Conference: The Start of My HIV Advocacy Journey



By Jaybreel Itayem

Hello, my name is Jay Itayem and I am a junior studying Health Policy and Management at the Gillings School of Public Health at UNC. I had the privilege of attending both the HIV Speaks on Jones Street event and the HIV is Not a Crime Conference—two incredible experiences that allowed me to develop a stronger passion in HIV advocacy.

The HIV Speaks on Jones Street event was my first real experience in HIV advocacy work. I was joined with other advocates to visit the legislative building to speak to the NC General Assembly regarding policies that impact people living with HIV in North Carolina. The main actions we advocated for included increasing the eligibility of the HIV Medication Assistance Program to 400-500% above the FPL, expanding North Carolina's Good Samaritan Law, and increasing access to preventive services, like PrEP and PEP.

I had the honor of talking to Representative Maria Cervania and Senator Dan Blue, as well as several legislative assistants. These individuals were very receptive to our concerns and we had very meaningful and productive conversations. My role in the group was to highlight the HIV statistics in North Carolina, including how our state has one of the highest cases and yet we still have a long way to go in regard to the actions we addressed. I felt like this was an important and important step in opening the door for our state's legislators to be educated on the realities of HIV in North Carolina, and to understand the crucial need for these actions to be implemented.



The HIV is Not a Crime Conference was an event that profoundly shaped my understanding of HIV criminalization. Prior to attending the event, I was not fully aware that people living with HIV were criminalized simply based on their status. Early on, I wondered why some individuals wished to not disclose their HIV status, but quickly into the conference I came to a realization that it is not easy whatsoever. Disclosing often comes with scrutiny, stigma, and even potential for being imprisoned. I got to talk to powerful and impactful individuals like Monique Howell, who was a survivor of HIV criminalization. Her story was an eye-opening one in which I began to see how these outdated laws continue to fuel inequities against PLWH. It allowed me to sympathize with the cause and to develop a stronger commitment to advocating for a change.

I am beyond grateful for these experiences and I hope to continue to learn more about HIV policies to better support those impacted by them.

CARE in Action: Community Voices in HIV Cure Research



By LaToya Murchison

From June 4–6, 2025, I had the opportunity to participate in the CARE Community Event and the CARE Annual Meeting, both held on the campus of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The community event brought together members of the Community Advisory Board, researchers, and community stakeholders to discuss the ongoing importance of HIV cure research. One of our valued community partners, the North Carolina AIDS Action Network (NCAAN), shared a compelling presentation on how recent budget cuts are impacting the HIV community across North Carolina.

The event also featured a dynamic panel discussion focused on the critical role of community engagement and collaboration in advancing research, as well as the importance of policy advocacy in shaping HIV prevention and care efforts.

On June 5–6, I was honored to present alongside Dr. Allison Mathews, our Community Engagement Coordinator, on behalf of the Community Advisory Board. Together, we highlighted recent community events and educational initiatives designed to make HIV cure science more accessible and understandable to the public.

On June 6, I had the opportunity to speak at the CARE Annual Meeting, where I presented on the importance of community engagement in advancing research and policy advocacy.

Overall, the CARE Community Event and CARE Annual Meeting were a great success, and I am grateful for the opportunity to be a part of such a wonderful organization.

Vision For Change Event Series



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Chapel Hill NC 27599-0001, USA

July 13-14, 2025 | Atlanta, Georgia | AIDS Week 2025

September 4-7, 2025 | Washington, D.C. | US Conference on HIV/AIDS (USCHA)

October 1-5, 2025 | Atlanta, Georgia | AIDS Week 2025

November 5-8, 2025 | Philadelphia, Pennsylvania | Association of Nurses in AIDS Care: ANAC 2025

July 21-22, 2025 | Washington, D.C. | National African American AIDS Conference

August 20-24, 2025 | Atlanta, Georgia | National Latinx AIDS Awareness Day

September 9-13, 2025 | Atlanta, Georgia | National African American AIDS Conference

September 14-18, 2025 | Atlanta, Georgia | National African American AIDS Conference

September 19-23, 2025 | Atlanta, Georgia | National African American AIDS Conference

September 24-28, 2025 | Atlanta, Georgia | National African American AIDS Conference

September 29-October 3, 2025 | Atlanta, Georgia | National African American AIDS Conference

October 4-6, 2025 | Atlanta, Georgia | National African American AIDS Conference

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October 31-November 1, 2025 | Atlanta, Georgia | National African American AIDS Conference

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