



THE UNIVERSITY  
of NORTH CAROLINA  
at CHAPEL HILL



## UNC CENTER FOR AIDS RESEARCH

NEWS LETTER | July 2025

Third Edition



### Elevating Community Engagement

#### HINAC 6 – Advancing Advocacy, Reclaiming Power

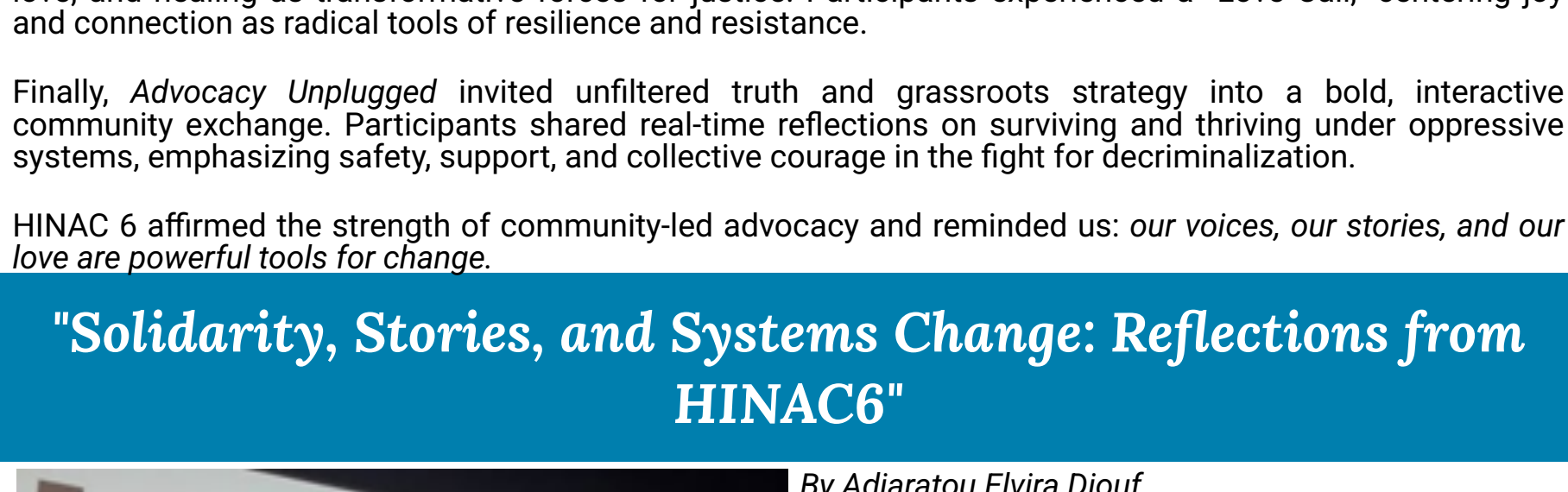


By Alicia Diggs CFAR OCE Manager

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 unofficially) 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



NC HINAC Host Committee

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 Participants engaged in hands-on activities to revise outdated policies, identify stigma-reinforcing language, and explore legal reform strategies.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.

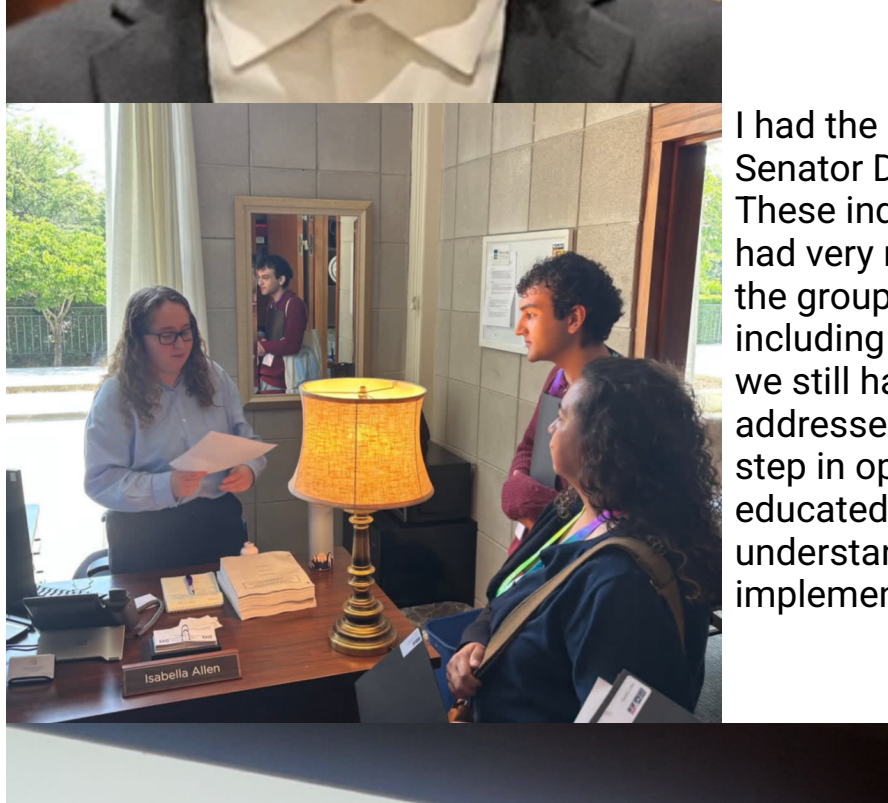
The session *Love Is an Act of RESISTANCE* led by the Black United Leadership Initiative (BULI) explored joy, love, and healing as transformative forces for justice. Participants experienced a "Love Call," centering joy and connection as radical tools of resilience and resistance.

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

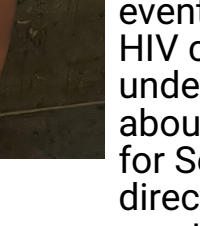


The HIV Is Not A Crime 6 (HINAC6) Training Academy was a fun, interactive, and highly educational experience! One I'm incredibly grateful to have been given the opportunity to be a part of. The atmosphere felt like a summer camp in the best way possible, as it was both well-organized and refreshingly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

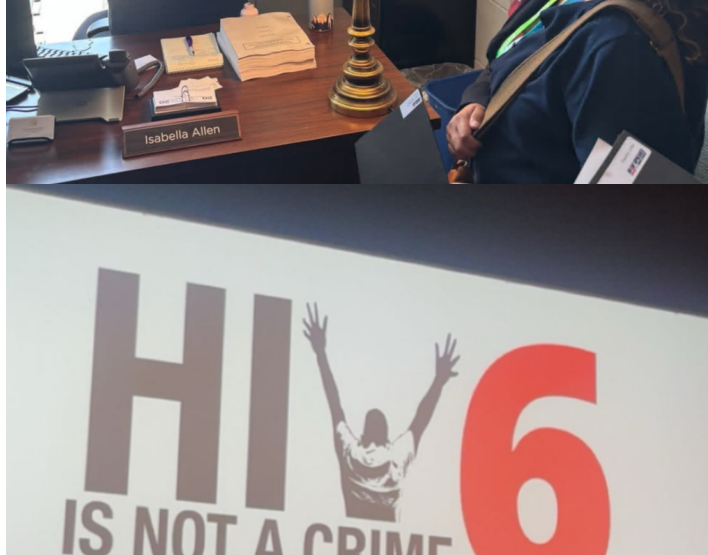
As a West African, I've always understood the power of policies in advancing health initiatives, particularly when it comes to funding. However, I never considered how this same power could lead to health criminalization. This conference gave me a newfound interest in the intersection of legal systems, 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 the 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 the future



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

By Jaybrael 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.



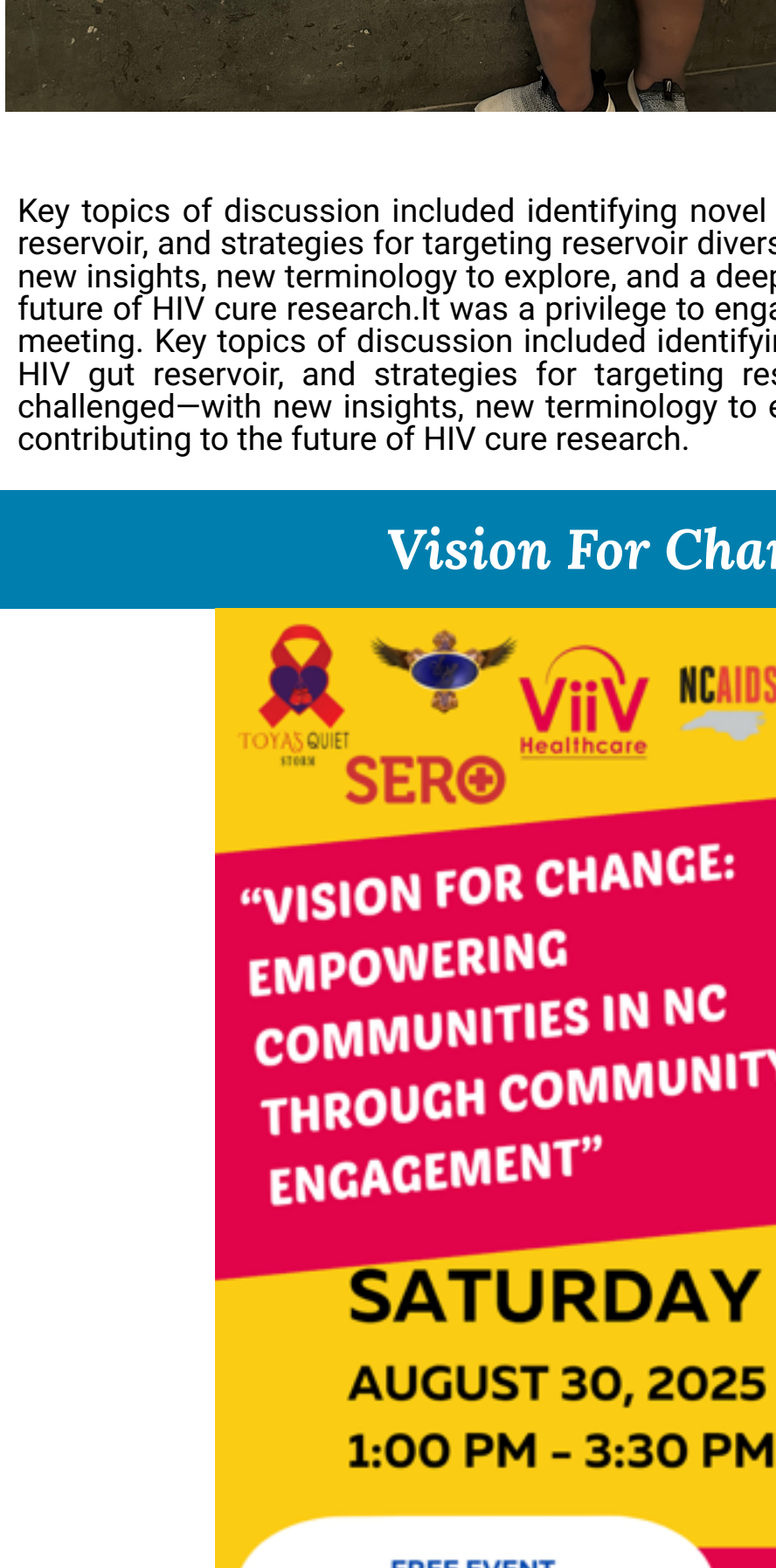
I had the honor of talking to Representative Maria Cervania and Senator Dan Blue, as well as several legislative assistants. These individuals were very receptive to our concerns and we had very meaningful and productive conversations. My role in the group was to highlight the HIV statistics in North Carolina, including how the state has one of the highest cases and yet we still have a long way to go in regards to the actions we addressed. I felt like these conversations were an 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. Hearing her story was eye-opening 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. We also shared details about our upcoming HIV Career Summit, scheduled for September 2025. It was a privilege to engage directly with scientists and researchers during the meeting.

Key topics of discussion included identifying novel latency-regulating factors, characterizing the HIV gut reservoir, and strategies for targeting reservoir diversity. I left the event both inspired and challenged—with new insights, new terminology to explore, and a deepened commitment to learning and contributing to the future of HIV cure research. It was a privilege to engage directly with scientists and researchers during the meeting. Key topics of discussion included identifying novel latency-regulating factors, characterizing the HIV gut reservoir, and strategies for targeting reservoir diversity. I left the event both inspired and challenged—with new insights, new terminology to explore, and a deepened commitment to learning and contributing to the future of HIV cure research.

#### Vision For Change Event Series

**"VISION FOR CHANGE: EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES IN NC THROUGH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT"**

**SATURDAY**  
**AUGUST 30, 2025**  
**1:00 PM – 3:30 PM**

**FREE EVENT**  
**MUST REGISTER FOR ENTRY**

**What to expect**

- ✓ DJ name: Mr. Jam
- ✓ Free Food
- ✓ Spoken Word
- ✓ Raffles and Prizes
- ✓ Vision Board Activity
- ✓ NO registration at door

**Don't miss to register**

**West End Community Foundation**  
1309 Halley St  
Durham, NC 27707

**LINK TO REGISTER – [HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/NCCHANGEVISION](https://tinyurl.com/ncchangevision)**

#### Upcoming Events/Conferences

**13th IAS Conference on HIV Science**  
July 13 - 17, 2025  
Kigali, Rwanda

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

**IDWeek 2025**  
October 19 - 22, 2025  
Atlanta, Georgia

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

#### HIV/AIDS Upcoming Awareness Days

**July 21- Zero HIV Stigma Day- Theme: Beyond Labels: Redefining HIV Narratives**

**August 20- Southern HIV/AIDS Awareness Day**

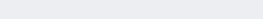
**August 25- National Faith HIV/AIDS Awareness Day**

**September 9- National African Immigrants and Refugee HIV and Hepatitis Awareness Day**

**September 18- National HIV/AIDS and Aging Awareness Day**

**September 27- National Gay Men's HIV/AIDS Awareness Day**

**October 15- National Latinx AIDS Awareness Day- Theme: "Start Treatment. Stick to It. Get Better."**



Copyright © 2023 UNC CFAR, All rights reserved.

Email us at: [unccfar@med.unc.edu](mailto:unccfar@med.unc.edu)

Our mailing address is:

UNC CFAR  
Bioinformatics Building 130 Mason Farm Road  
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-0001, USA