



WNCAP

Western North Carolina AIDS Project

ALL SERVICES
ARE FREE
AND CONFIDENTIAL
1-828-252-7489
or **1-800-346-3731**
www.wncap.org

HIV/AIDS LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY DAY

WNCAP sent a team of advocates to Raleigh to meet with state legislators on June 17th for the annual HIV/AIDS Legislative Advocacy Day. Advocates stressed the need to keep the AIDS Drug Assistance Program, ADAP, available for those who need it and to improve access to healthcare by expanding Medicaid. The team delivered educational materials and petitions for the expansion of Medicaid to the offices of Governor McCrory and 16 Western North Carolina legislators and met directly with Sen. Terry Van Duyn, Sen. Warren Daniels, Rep. Susan Fisher, Rep. Chuck McGrady and Rep. Nathan Ramsey.

THE CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION ESTIMATES THAT 16% OF PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV ARE UNAWARE THEY ARE INFECTED.

Legislative Advocacy Day is an opportunity to educate elected officials on issues that matter to people living with HIV. There is nothing more powerful than the personal stories that we bring to them. US Veteran and WNCAP Volunteer, Jerry Lynch talked about the meaning of freedom, "Freedom in this country should include freedom from worry that you will be able to get treatment and medication, so you can live."

Early and uninterrupted HIV treatment gives people the best chance of staying healthy and living a long and productive life. It also greatly reduces the risk of transmission by reducing the presence of the HIV virus in the body. The AIDS Drug Assistance Program provides life-saving medication to low-income North Carolinians that do not qualify for Medicaid. About one in every five people living with HIV in North Carolina get their medications through the program. That makes a huge impact on public health and the lives of North Carolina citizens.

Medicaid expansion would cover an additional 500,000 low-income people, including 5000 living with HIV. Currently, Medicaid is only available to the elderly, blind, disabled, children and some parents. Until we expand, people with HIV cannot access preventive healthcare unless the HIV infection has progressed to AIDS. Full health coverage for people with HIV reduces the likelihood that they will end up in the emergency room with preventable health problems that are more costly, more difficult to treat and more likely to result in premature death.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 16% of people living with HIV are unaware they are infected. Medicaid expansion would



WNCAP HIV/AIDS Advocates with NC Sen. Terry Van Duyn(c), Jerry Lynch, Jennifer Poore, Michelle Stinson, and Peggy Weil

offer wider and more reliable access to HIV testing, treatment and care. Diagnosing more people and getting them into treatment will help reduce the number of new infections offering us the best hope for ending the AIDS epidemic in our lifetime.

The Southern US is the region with the fastest growing epidemic in the nation. It is also the region with the greatest number of people without health insurance and the highest rates of preventable deaths. Yet, Southern states continue to refuse to expand Medicaid.

The state of North Carolina could lead the south to a healthier future for our children free from HIV and AIDS by expanding Medicaid.

Sending letters, making phone calls and sending emails to state legislators about

policies that are important and programs that need to be funded is extremely valuable to ensuring that your interests are protected.

Please take a moment to contact your state legislators and let them know that you care about people living with HIV and you support fully funding the AIDS Drug Assistance Program and the expansion of Medicaid. Contact information for North Carolina State Senators and Representatives can be found at ncleg.net.

If you are interested in learning more about our advocacy program, please call **Peggy Weil at 252-7489**.

Special thanks go to our partners, NC AIDS Action Network and NC Harm Reduction Coalition for organizing the event. This trip was made possible through a grant from AIDS United.

**VARICK CHAPEL
A.M.E. ZION CHURCH
OUR FAITH
Lights
The Way!**



WNCAP educator, Michael Harney (r), with members of Varick Chapel A.M.E. Zion.

Congratulations to Varick Chapel, AME Zion Church, for their leadership by being the first church to hold an HIV testing event as part of Western North Carolina AIDS Project's "Our Faith Lights the Way" campaign. Special thanks go to Pastor Damita Jo Wilder for hosting.

Due to health inequities and socio-economic disparities, Black Americans account for the highest rate of new HIV infections and for about half of deaths among people with an HIV diagnosis. These are chilling statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It will require a concerted effort by governmental agencies, AIDS service organizations and faith communities to improve access to care and reduce new infections. We can do this by raising awareness, ending stigma and advocating for sound public policy.

Pastor Wilder believes in reaching out to those living with HIV and encouraging HIV testing. "The ministry is outside the four walls. What happens in the community affects the church. It can be the church's desire to be an avenue of knowledge. For God tells us through the prophet Hosea, "My people perish for a lack of knowledge."

WNCAP launched the "Our Faith Lights the Way" campaign this June in honor of National HIV Testing Day. The first two churches to hold a testing event in each county of Buncombe and Cleveland receive 50 "Our Faith Lights the Way" church fans. Also, the first 20 participants who take an HIV test at each church will receive a \$5 Target gift card.

For more information on holding an HIV testing event or to schedule an appointment for a free, confidential HIV test please contact **Cameron Edmonds, WNCAP Prevention Specialist, at 252-7489**.