

# Trans\* Wellness Project

We Are Committed to Providing Compassionate and Nonjudgmental Health Care to Philadelphia's Diverse Transgender Community

SIGNIFICANT BARRIERS, INCLUDING DISCRIMINATION AND STIGMA, PAVE THE WAY FOR HEALTH DISPARITIES AND POOR HEALTH OUTCOMES WITHIN THE TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY



## Background

The stages of HIV care, also known as the HIV care continuum, demonstrate significant gaps in HIV services, and efforts are underway at the federal, state, and local levels to develop and implement strategies to improve health outcomes for people living with HIV (PLWH). The HIV care continuum can be described by the following sequential steps: (1) diagnosis of HIV infection, (2) linkage to care, (3) retention in care, (4) receipt of antiretroviral therapy (ART), and (5) achievement of viral suppression (a very low level of HIV in the body). In the United States, there are 1.2 million people living with HIV, and according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 30% had achieved viral suppression, which means that only 3 out of 10 people living with HIV had the virus under control. Viral suppression results in significantly improved health outcomes as well as dramatically decreased likelihood of HIV transmission (96% reduced risk of sexual transmission). The challenge of linking and retaining people living with HIV in care and treatment can be demonstrated by CDC data, which reveals that 14% of PLWH remain undiagnosed, and of those diagnosed, only 40% receive and stay in regular HIV medical care.<sup>1</sup> Successful retention in medical care is defined as one medical visit during each six month period of a 24-month interval, spaced more than 60 days apart, and this medical visit frequency improves survival, and allows people to be as healthy as possible.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the need to improve along the HIV care continuum plays a critical role in both care and prevention.



## What Are We Doing?

Mazzoni Center's Trans\* Wellness Project is focused on meeting the self-identified needs of trans communities in Philadelphia, using a holistic and multi-faceted approach. Through a team of peer outreach workers, we connect with individual trans women through street outreach and education, providing one-on-one support, referrals, and information about our programs and services, along with other resources available to them in the Philadelphia area. The Trans\* Wellness Project works together with the Community Advisory Board, Sisterly Leading Others Via Education (L.O.V.E.), to build community capacity and support the leadership of trans women. The Trans\* Wellness Project acknowledges that trans women have been historically neglected in the discussion around HIV care, so our approach focuses on understanding the unique needs and barriers to care for this community.

### UNIQUE FEATURES OF TRANS\* WELLNESS PROJECT

- ▶ We focus on engaging individuals in care, while also working at the community-level to **reduce stigma** and provide educational opportunities around HIV.
- ▶ Our program places importance on understanding the **unique needs** and barriers that trans women face around receiving HIV care.
- ▶ We ensure that community members have several different access points to becoming/staying engaged in care by **providing case management**, peer navigation, and community support groups.
- ▶ We provide a weekly community-based, **drop-in center** where clients meet with peers and receive comprehensive medical services, rapid HIV testing and STD screening, and wraparound support services, including legal consultation, risk-reduction counseling, health education, substance use and mental health assessment, screening for public benefits eligibility, and employment and education resources.

<sup>1</sup> "HIV/AIDS Care Continuum." AIDS.gov. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 6 Mar. 2015. Web. 11 May 2015.

<sup>2</sup> "HAB HIV Performance Measures." Health Resources and Services Administration. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Nov. 2013. Web. 11 May 2015.

## Initial Trends of Trans\* Wellness Project

One of the biggest successes from the Trans\* Wellness Project thus far has been our ability to retain a large majority of the participants in care. Since we have several access points through which our participants are engaged, it has been relatively easy to stay in touch with participants after their initial engagement with the program. Through rigorous data analysis, one of the most significant factors that we've seen is the overwhelming number of trans women that struggle to meet basic needs for survival. For example, upon enrollment into the program, 69% of participants identified a need for help with food and other basic needs.

### CLIENT STORY

*"Meagan,\*\* a 27 year old multiracial transgender woman participating in the Trans\* Wellness Project, cites this program as one of the factors that helped her become re-engaged in HIV care after falling out of medical care for nearly a year. Shortly after enrolling into the program, Meagan aged out of her mother's insurance plan and was unable to prioritize obtaining her own insurance due to personal life circumstances as well as a focus on basic needs and survival. During her time out of care, she became very ill and her CD4 count dropped drastically, and viral load was over 145,000, an indication that her immune system was not fighting HIV well. In combination with the program's case management services, she was able to utilize the wraparound services provided by the Trans\* Wellness Project to reengage in care and regain her health. Meagan's case manager stated: "my client's participation in the Trans\* Wellness Project worked as a safety net after she was dropped from her mother's insurance and helped her navigate the system to get back into care." This story, and countless others, are constant reminders of the critical services provided through the Trans\* Wellness Project.*

*\*\*Meagan is a pseudonym for a client at Mazzoni Center.*

## What Does Trans\* Mean?

We use the asterisk symbol (\*) to indicate a variable condition, and reflect a broad range of gender identities and experiences. We use Trans\* as an umbrella term that includes anyone identifying along the transgender spectrum, those who consider themselves bi-gendered or multi-gendered, as well as people who do not identify with any labels.

## Agency Overview

Mazzoni Center is the only health care provider in the Philadelphia region specifically targeting the unique health care needs of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) communities. Our mission is to provide quality comprehensive health and wellness services in an LGBT-focused environment, while preserving the dignity and improving the quality of life of the individuals we serve. We strive constantly to break down the cultural insensitivity and institutional homophobia often encountered by LGBT individuals accessing the mainstream health care system by providing sensitive, knowledgeable, and appropriate health care and preventative services. Mazzoni Center offers a full array of primary health care services, mental and behavioral health services, and LGBT legal services, as well as HIV and STD testing, food bank and housing subsidies for families and individuals affected by HIV, support groups, outreach and education programs.



**mazzoni center**  
LGBT HEALTH & WELL-BEING

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Mazzoni Center, 21 S. 12th Street, 8th FL, Philadelphia, PA 19107 – [mazzonicenter.org](http://mazzonicenter.org)