#BeGlowdAF: Young People Encourage Peers to Get Tested for HIV and Hepatitis C

A new Iris House campaign promotes HIV, hep C and STI testing and emphasizes the importance of mental health among young people.

February 15, 2021 By Trent Straube

What makes you glow? For a group of young social media influencers in a new awareness campaign titled “Simply Glow’d,” the answer is getting tested for HIV, hepatitis C and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and then “keeping it 100” by making smart sexual choices and staying mentally healthy.

The campaign is spearheaded by Iris House, a New York City–based center for women and families fighting HIV/AIDS, substance misuse and STIs, with funding from the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Agency (SAMHSA) and creative assistance from the marketing team at AIDS Healthcare Foundation.

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It targets young people ages 13 to 29 in East and Central Harlem and the South Bronx. In New York City, according to Iris House, nearly 10,000 people under 29 are living with HIV. What's more, over 40,000 young people between 13 and 24 were diagnosed with an STI. And alcohol continues to be the most widely used substance among America's youth.

To reach this youthful audience with messages promoting sexual and mental health, the campaign includes images and videos of local social media influencers, notably young people of color and those who are LGBTQ and nonbinary. The idea is to get youth to shine, to #BeGlowdAF, #GetThatGlow and #GlowUp by getting tested and encouraging awareness. Visit Iris House's Istagram account for samples, or visit ProjectGlow-IrisHouse.org.

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"This new campaign," said Iris House executive director Ingrid Floyd, in the press release, "shines the light on the need to engage young people in discussions on how to end the HIV epidemic, teaching them how to make healthy sexual decisions and allowing them to Glow and be proud of the decisions they make."

The campaign's website best states its mission:

> Using the #GlowUp mindset, we strive to empower and celebrate a straight-forward, yet not critical, approach to the way young folks engage and support each other around sex and substance use.
>
> This campaign will not only promote HIV/STI testing and supportive services but will also package awareness in a fresh and non-clinical way. People will create personal promotional content to show solidarity and share it across their social-media platforms.
>
> There is a Glow that comes from knowing and owning your HIV status as well as Keeping it 100 about how we engage and support one another. Project Glow isn't just a campaign but a lifestyle. We invite everyone to add their shine. #GetThatGlow

The campaign was launched to coincide with National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, (#NBHAAD) marked each February 7, and it included several HIV testing events. Did you know that in 2019, African Americans represented 13% of the U.S. population but made up 43% of new HIV cases? In the South, they accounted for 52% of HIV diagnoses. You can learn more about HIV among African Americans—and several other minority populations—by visiting the HIV/AIDS Basics on POZ.com and clicking on the "HIV in Specific Populations" section.

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For related articles that recently appeared in POZ, see "Behind the Partnership to Transform Black and Brown HIV Efforts," "The Most Important Health Concerns of Black LGBTQ Americans" and "Racial Justice Index: A New Tool to Combat Racism Within HIV Groups."

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