

ACCESS
engage
& **ACTIVATE**
CENTERING AND
RECENTERING
KEY POPULATIONS

SUCCESS STORY

Engaging CBOs to Reduce Health
Disparities Among People of Color /
Denver, CO



**TARGET
POPULATION**

Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other communities of color; people of transgender experience; gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men; Spanish-speaking communities, and other Colorado residents living with HIV



LOCATION

Aurora, Colorado, and the Denver Metropolitan Area



**FUNDING
SOURCE**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Colorado HIV/AIDS Prevention Program, and Ryan White Parts A and B

| SUMMARY

The Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment has increased community involvement as an integral part of Colorado's HIV/AIDS Strategy (COHAS). In close partnership with the Aurora-based nonprofit organization [It Takes a Village, Inc.](#), they have used discussion groups and peer-led support groups to increase engagement, provide essential services, and combat isolation among African Americans and other communities of color; people of transgender experience, gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men, Spanish-speaking communities, women, and PLWH who are experiencing incarceration.

This Success Story highlights four of It Takes a Village's [programs](#): Brothas4Ever, a group that has facilitated connections for thousands of Black same gender loving men in the Denver metro area for over twenty years; TransAction, a peer-led HIV prevention program for transgender women of color; Hermanos, an educational and social group for Latinx gay men funded by Ryan White Part B, and The Community Group, a peer-led psychosocial support group funded by Ryan White Part A that is open to all people living with HIV.

| BACKGROUND

The Office of STI/HIV/Viral Hepatitis (OSHV) at the Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment (Ryan White Part B), in conjunction with the community-centered Denver HIV Resources [Planning Council](#) at the Denver Department of Public Health and Environment (Ryan White Part A), collaborated to create Colorado's Integrated Strategy for 2022-2026. This Strategy is known as the Colorado HIV/AIDS Strategy (COHAS) and is being executed by multiple workgroups focused on the core themes presented during the document's creation. These themes/workgroups are:

- Preventing HIV (Gaps and opportunities for the delivery of PEP, Improve Access to HIV Testing, Destigmatize HIV)
- Improving Health Outcomes (Rapid ART, Improve Linkage to Care, Increase Psychosocial Support)
- Disrupting Inequities (Creation of Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) toolkit, Anti-stigma campaign, Advocacy training)

[The Colorado HIV Alliance for Prevention, Care and Treatment](#) (Alliance) and the [Denver HIV Resources Planning Council](#) (DHRPC) work together to develop innovative approaches to community engagement to move the COHAS forward. Made up of 16 members, the Alliance advises CDPHE to determine the best ways to prevent, care for and treat HIV/AIDS in Colorado. It promotes statewide collaboration and information sharing among HIV/AIDS service providers, public health agencies, community members, those affected by HIV and medical, behavioral, and social scientists. It is an expert source for the state on HIV/AIDS issues, resources, and trends, and provides an opportunity for everyone affected by HIV/AIDS in Colorado to work together to end the epidemic. The Alliance and associated work groups meet throughout the year to provide recommendations on how federal and state HIV care and prevention efforts should be directed, and all meetings are open to the public.

Established in 2002, [It Takes a Village, Inc.](#) (ITAV) is an Aurora, CO based non-profit geared towards reducing health and social disparities among people of color in the Denver metropolitan area. ITAV was founded to address the lack of services primarily for African Americans, however, they provide support to people of all races. While services are provided for all, ITAV recognizes that people of color are disproportionately impacted by many social and health-related issues and aims to reduce, if not eliminate, these disparities.

CORE ACTIVITIES

[Brothas4Ever](#)

Brothas4Ever was developed with the input of fifty Black gay men generated from three focus groups hosted in 2000. These focus groups were launched in response to concerns raised by Bob Bongiovanni, then Prevention Manager in the HIV/STI section of the Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment, about the high rate of new HIV infections among Black gay men. The men named the group Brothas4Ever and identified isolation, homophobia, racism within the LGBTQ+ community, and lack of education as the main reasons for the elevated infection rates.

Brothas4Ever members are African American men and African immigrants, and the group welcomes all Black gay men. The program does not ask about HIV status, but many participants have shared that they are either on PrEP or living with HIV. The group has held PrEP educational events and HIV testing events along with social activities (bowling, barbeques, etc.) to reduce isolation. HIV and STI Testing is available at It Takes a Village on a walk-in basis five days a week, and the men who participate in Brothas4Ever are regular testers and bring in friends for testing. The program is coordinated by Errol Flynn, Dusty Raymond, and Marquise Ivra, staff members who are part of the Black GBM community. This program has been funded by CDPHE with a grant from the CDC since 2003. It Takes a Village honored CDPHE with an award at the 10th anniversary of Brothas4Ever for their support and guidance.

TransAction

In 2005 - 2006, It Takes a Village provided HIV testing, HIV prevention counseling, and substance abuse counseling to nine trans women, five of whom were recently released from incarceration. During a two-week period, two trans women tested positive for HIV. Three recently released women were already HIV positive. When ITAV sought to provide referrals to competent providers for medical care and mental health and substance abuse counseling, they were at a loss. In late 2006 and early 2007, It Takes a Village convened a transgender planning group to learn what types of services and interventions could be offered to reduce HIV transmission, increase safer behavior, and create a sense of support among the trans community. The planning group chose the Popular Opinion Leader intervention and named themselves "TransAction".

This program has been funded by the Colorado HIV/AIDS Prevention Grant Program at CDPHE, with support, guidance, and training from the department. TransAction staff consists of two Transgender women who co-manage the program and provide HIV Testing and PrEP screening and navigation.

Hermanos

In early 2023, It Takes a Village had a substantial number of Spanish speaking men living with HIV who expressed that a group that would allow them to meet with other men and learn more about HIV, discuss different topics related to HIV, and reduce their isolation would be beneficial. Many of the men were immigrants with no family in the United States. ITAV wrote to CDPHE and expressed that an innovative program for these men would increase their knowledge of their medical regimens and help them navigate the confusing systems they had to go through to obtain medical, dental, and other care. The group began in February 2023 with 19 men in attendance. They named themselves Hermanos, and a group member was selected to facilitate and communicate with his peers over the months.

The program obtained funding in March 2023. During the year, the group became involved with the mental health services provided under Ryan White Part A/MAI due to a member's death by suicide. The group has engaged with Gilead Sciences physicians who discussed medication and self-advocacy in Spanish, and they have also hosted bowling and park activities to reduce social isolation among members. Hermanos members have supported each other not only in HIV care, but also in recovery from substance abuse. The group continues to welcome new members, particularly those from the Venezuelan migrant community.

The Community Group – Psychosocial Support Group

The Community Group is comprised of individuals living with HIV who provide support to each other. This group is peer-led, meets twice a month and all are welcome. This program is funded by Ryan White Part A and is open to all people living with HIV. Interesting, relevant topics of discussion and delicious lunches make this group very popular. Spanish-speaking people living with HIV participate in this group with translation.

| STRENGTHS & DATA: IMPACT AND AWARENESS

“CDPHE is cutting edge when it comes to keeping up with HIV trends and helping community contractors respond to those trends. In a state where African Americans are only 4% of the population but over 17% of new infections, they not only look at the data, but they listen to those of us on the front lines. And they respond.” - Imani Latiff, Executive Director, It Takes a Village, Inc.

- **Brothas4Ever:** Thousands of African American same gender loving men have been served since the program began in 2000, with 570 visits to the weekly group for calendar year 2023. This has led to an increase in the number of Black gay men getting tested at It Takes a Village as well as getting linked to care through It Takes a Village’s Client Services Department
- **TransAction:** From 2007 to 2012, 289 transgender women of color participated in groups, HIV testing, and other activities. During 2023, 50 transgender women of color were tested for HIV and STIs at It Takes a Village, along with 182 of their sexual partners and people within their social networks. It Takes a Village began the first PrEP program targeting trans women of color in 2019 with marketing and outreach, and over 50 women are now consistently on the PrEP regimen.
- **Hermanos:** During the period April 2023 through December 2023, 16 men participated in 88 sessions. All are linked to care, actively involved in their HIV care, and all have reached undetectable levels.
- **The Community Group Participant Testimonies ([Video](#))**

“...in 2015 I was diagnosed with HIV and your program came to the facility I was in because I was incarcerated at the time...they explained who they were and how they could help me in my journey...they help you with everything. They get you through the ups and the downs, they helped with my medication, they helped me with housing, they helped me get into treatment and now I’m six months clean...It Takes a Village, they went to bat for me, like really went to bat for me. The program is probably one of the best things that has happened. I greatly appreciate the quality of life that they have, that they give you. They give their all, they want you to be successful and they go work for it.”

- Nakita, The Community Group member

| STAKEHOLDERS

- [Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment](#)
- [It Takes a Village, Inc.](#)

| PROGRAM CONTACTS

Brothas4Ever

Erroll Flynn
MBB Manager/Brothas4Ever Coordinator
It Takes a Village, Inc.
errol.flynn@ittakesavillageco.org

TransAction

Cagzmier Jumper
Vanellope Santibanez
Opinion Leader Co-Manager/HIV Testing Counselor
It Takes a Village, Inc.
cagzmier.jumper@ittakesavillageco.org
vanellope.santibanez@ittakesavillageco.org

Hermanos

Maritza Oliva
Community Without Walls Program Manager/Case Manager
It Takes a Village, Inc.
maritza.oliva@ittakesavillageco.org

The Community Group

Thera Marshall
Program Manager/PrEP Coordinator
It Takes a Village, Inc.
thera.marshall@ittakesavillageco.org

Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment

Maria Jackson
Care and Services Program Manager
Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment
maria.jackson@state.co.us