

## Public Awareness & Community Engagement (PACE) Committee Meeting Summary

June 18, 2025

<b>Date:</b>	Wednesday, June 18, 2025	<b>Type:</b>	Virtual, Zoom
<b>Start Time:</b>	12:45 p.m.	<b>End Time:</b>	2:15 p.m.
<b>Leaders</b>	Angel H. Ruiz & Reggie Knox (Incoming Co-Chairs), Africka Hinds (Supporting Chair, CHPC Chair), Jenny Bobadilla-Pincos (CT Department of Public Health Resource Liaison)		
<b>Participants:</b>	18	<b>Next Meeting:</b>	July 16, 2025

### WELCOME & ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

Angel H. Ruiz and Reggie Knox, Co-Chairs of the PACE Committee, warmly welcomed attendees, emphasizing the committee's foundational principle of gathering and incorporating feedback from every individual present to ensure the achievement of its core responsibilities. Mr. Ruiz further explained PACE's role within the broader Connecticut HIV Planning Consortium (CHPC), explaining its commitment to assisting in the recruitment and orientation of new members, development of impactful campaigns and communication strategies, and highlighting stories and insights to better connect with and serve the community.

The Public Awareness and Community Engagement (PACE) Committee is responsible for recruiting, retaining, mentoring, and orienting members of the Connecticut HIV Prevention Coalition (CHPC). It also coordinates marketing initiatives, public awareness campaigns, and health communication strategies, with a primary focus on developing strategies that support populations living with or at the highest risk of HIV in Connecticut.

PACE's efforts remain grounded in the goals of the Integrated Plan, which include:

- Reducing new HIV infections
- Increasing viral suppression rates
- Eliminating disparities and health inequities
- Strengthening collaboration through equity-centered storytelling and campaigns

Attendees were reminded of the meeting ground rules to ensure productive and respectful discussions:

• Allowing one person to speak at a time	• One person speaks at a time
• Share the floor – treat all with respect	• Ask questions if any terms or acronyms are unclear
• Use <b>ELMO (Everybody, Let's Move On)</b> if you feel a topic has been thoroughly discussed	• Raise a hand (physically or digitally) to signal you would like to speak

### INTRODUCTIONS & COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Mr. Ruiz and Mr. Knox facilitated an introduction and icebreaker activity, inviting each attendee to share their name and a recent personal connection they had made with their community through work, family, volunteering, or a small personal moment:

- **Angel Ruiz** connected with his community by attending his daughter's high school graduation, sharing the experience with many community members seeing their children graduate.
- **Reggie Knox** expressed his dedication to speaking to young people about HIV through the Alliance for Living program, "**Positively Speaking**." He visits high schools and junior high schools to discuss HIV infection, driven by a personal goal to prevent younger generations from facing what he experienced.
- **Africka Hinds** (CHPC Co-Chair, DPH HIV Prevention Program Supervisor, and Moderator at Asylum Hill Congregational Church) connects with her community through "**mingle with the moderator**" sessions at her church, providing members an opportunity to voice concerns and improve their church experience.

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- **Keith Taylor** of Staywell Health Center manages the HIV support group at his agency and is currently making bags for an upcoming Pride Celebration on August 28th in New London, CT.
- **Nilda Lebron** of Staywell Health Center connects with her community daily through her work as a medical case manager, providing support.
- **Victor Acevado** attends community meetings and engages in one-on-one conversations, stating that this allows him to **"find strength within myself to be a better person"** and leave a thoughtful, lasting impression.
- **Delita Rose Daniels** of the City of Hartford co-founded "Change the Narrative" with her family. This organization hosts youth and sports events addressing education and health disparities in Middletown.
- **Charles Hardy** recently connected with the Twilight Wish Foundation, which grants wishes to seniors, similar to the Make-A-Wish Foundation. He shared an example of an 80-year-old woman who rode a motorcycle for the first time with their help.
- **Clifford Batson facilitates groups involved with HIV/AIDS and conducts PrEP educational sessions. He described the committee as a collaborative learning environment, stating, "as a group, we're all here to learn from each other," and encouraged active participation.**
- **Monique Davis**, Outreach Prevention Coordinator at Health Services for the City of Hartford, shared a personal initiative: collecting women's underwear and pads in bulk after noticing a store selling such goods. With her son and sister, she assembled Ziplock bags containing essential items (pads, condoms, underwear, socks, and a \$10 gift card) and distributed them to people on street corners, noting the profound gratitude for these items, saying it **"goes a long way."**
- Other attendees shared experiences of connecting with their community through paid public health work, voluntary service, and charitable donations, including Kashia Lynch, Lauren Beaudry, Ruby Rios, Tom Alfano, and Jordan Wynn.

### PACE WORK PLAN REVIEW

Angel Ruiz provided a high-level overview of the PACE Committee's comprehensive work plan, highlighting both ongoing initiatives and future strategic endeavors. He underscored that all the committee's individual work contributes to the integrated plan's pillars, goals, and objectives.

#### Key areas of progress include:

- **The Summer Newsletter:** Significant progress has been made, incorporating extensive feedback from the previous month.
- **Shared Messaging via Social Media:** The committee is diligently creating a comprehensive social media library of resources. This initiative is particularly critical due to the impending closure of the ACT-housed distribution center, necessitating a consolidated repository for universal access.
- **Outreach Materials:** While some initiatives have experienced temporary pauses, they remain vital components of the plan and "have not been forgotten."
- **Youth Engagement Proposals:** Efforts are underway to re-engage youth voices.

Projects that have been paused but are not forgotten include some media content that required direct posting due to administrative issues; however, content is still being promoted through partner networks. A committee video campaign is also planned for the fall.

### NEWSLETTER PROGRESS & PLANNING

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The committee dedicated significant time to a thorough, page-by-page review of the draft Summer 2025 Newsletter, acknowledging its long-term development. The overarching goal is to achieve launch readiness by July. Immediately following the summer launch, the committee will begin brainstorming ideas and content for the subsequent Fall/Winter newsletters, highlighting the continuous nature of this project.

## Key Discussions and Feedback on the Draft Newsletter:

- **Featured Story:** Reggie Knox's narrative will be the prominent feature story for the summer newsletter, envisioned as a **"person-centric story"**. Communication efforts are being renewed with Ken Plourd from Cross Sector to finalize the interview content. In a moment of light interaction, Mr. Knox confirmed his culinary talents, stating that he cooks a **"big big dinner"** for Thanksgiving that **"feeds the building I live in,"** which led to recommendations for him to include a recipe in his feature.
- **Imagery:** A significant recommendation was to **replace an older photograph on page two** that depicted council members, as a participant expressed that the image served as a **"trigger"** for some individuals. The section outlining the goals of the CHPC on page two was noted as clearly presented and informative.
- **Inclusive Language:** Page three garnered positive feedback for its **"clean"** and direct presentation. It was decided that this page would become a **permanent fixture in every subsequent newsletter, dedicated to "inclusive language in HIV care"**. This inclusion underscores the committee's commitment to promoting sensitive and appropriate communication practices, extending beyond HIV-specific contexts to general communication principles, recognizing that **"it doesn't matter if it's HIV. It's just in general about how we communicate"**.
- **Audience and Accessibility:** While reviewing page four, a crucial discussion centered on the newsletter's target audience and the potential for the current volume of information to be **"overwhelming for some people"**. The strong suggestion was to **"break that down"** and make it more **"public-friendly,"** drawing parallels to how a previous **"integrated plan"** was simplified and disseminated in digestible pieces over an entire month. It was also recommended that the **"integrated HIV prevention plan should be at the top"** of the newsletter to immediately convey its core message and **"first message,"** making it more impactful and accessible, particularly for new providers.
- **Call to Action:** The **"where do you fit in"** section was identified as essential for actively encouraging new membership by helping individuals visualize and **"find themselves"** in their role within the CHPC's efforts. To optimize space and enhance direct engagement, members recommended removing redundant information, specifically content repeated across different sections, to create room for **"calls to action"**. These calls to action, such as instructions to **"fill the application out"** or **"take this QR code,"** were deemed vital for facilitating reader participation and should be strategically placed to ensure maximum visibility, potentially appearing both at the beginning and end so that if a reader misses it on one page, they will **"definitely see it at the end"**.

## Ideas for the Fall/Winter Newsletter

- **Highlighting Testimonies or Personal Stories:** Strong support emerged for featuring individual **"testimony"** or **"somebody's story, somebody's life"** in each monthly edition, recognizing the power of personal narratives in connecting with readers and humanizing the experience. Volunteers for sharing their stories or writing from their perspective were actively encouraged.
- **Interactive Elements:** Suggestions included incorporating **"jumbled word puzzles"** or similar activities that allow readers to actively engage with the content, such as forming words from a given set of letters, making the newsletter more interactive and fun.

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- **Balancing Positivity:** A proposal was made to include a "silent portion" or "memorial page" to honor those lost. However, this led to a critical discussion about maintaining a careful **"balance of positivity"** given the inherently **"heavy"** nature of HIV-related work. The consensus was to avoid content that could **"trigger things that think go down the rabbit hole of thinking negative,"** emphasizing the need for content that is **"positive digestible"** and leaves readers feeling **"okay,"** providing **"something to share"** with peers.
- **Good News and Mental Health/Wellness Corner:** To balance heavy topics, strong support emerged for a **"good news corner"** or a dedicated **"mental health or mental wellness corner"**. This section would feature self-care practices such as meditation, going for walks, and other activities that **"cultivate joy,"** exploring what joy looks like and how rest and outdoor activities contribute to it. A list of **"100 different things to do for self-care"** was offered as a potential resource.
- **Additional Resources:** The idea of a **"CHPC playlist"** was well-received as a unique and engaging element. Information about **HeadSpace**, a free mental wellness program available to Hartford residents and those who work in the City, was suggested as a valuable community resource to include, highlighting its various meditation lengths and articles.
- **Addressing Seasonal Challenges:** For the fall/winter editions, topics such as **"holiday blues"** and **"seasonal depression"** were suggested as particularly relevant, along with practical activities and coping mechanisms, like going for **"trail walks"**.
- **Open Call for Voices:** The committee expressed continued openness to incorporating any **"missing voices"** or topics that community members believe should be addressed in future newsletters. The preliminary deadline for fall content was set for the end of August, allowing time for compilation and translation before the July print deadline for the summer edition, ensuring **"every voice is heard"**.

## SOCIAL MEDIA RESOURCE FOLDER

A significant initiative discussed was the ongoing effort to establish a comprehensive social media library of resources. This digital library, envisioned as a Google Drive, aims to serve as a centralized platform from which members, agencies, and individuals, including youth and young adults, can readily access and utilize educational material and pre-designed social media posts. The primary goal is to significantly expand the statewide reach of various public awareness campaigns, particularly those focused on crucial topics like STIs and PrEP, to provide a **"bigger reach out throughout the state"**. A crucial operational detail noted was that **content shared within this folder would not be editable by users**, ensuring consistency and preventing the proliferation of multiple versions of the same material.

A prominent theme that emerged was the urgent need for more information and targeted campaigns concerning **PrEP**. Committee members highlighted that medical professionals frequently encounter questions from parents regarding PrEP, indicating a significant information gap on how to discuss this preventive measure within family contexts (**"What about the parents?"**). It was also observed that widespread misunderstanding surrounding PrEP, particularly among young people, often leads to reluctance or avoidance of its use because **"they think they want, they don't want to take a medication"**. The committee recognized that this misunderstanding is not exclusive to youth, as some facilitators themselves may lack comprehensive knowledge about PrEP, even holding **"the wrong concept about it"**. A previously developed video designed for girls about PrEP, which depicted a scenario in a club dressing room discussing PrEP, was suggested as a valuable existing resource that could be added to the library. The overall consensus strongly underscored the continued and pressing need for extensive education on PrEP for both young individuals and adults alike, acknowledging that **"a lot of education still missing"**.

Participants discussed the desired features of the social media library, expressing a need for easily accessible educational materials and social media posts that could be swiftly deployed on agency or personal social media feeds.

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The library is intended to house existing materials from various sources, including the DPH and CHPC, with the option for organizations to add their own logos to specific editable materials (though the versions stored in the shared folder would be non-editable). The concept of a structured submission process, possibly via a Google form, was also introduced, where content would be submitted, validated, and then categorized before being made available in the library, ensuring organization and relevance.

**OUTREACH & RECRUITMENT CARD UPDATE**

The committee discussed the progress and imminent dissemination of the newly developed outreach cards, which were collaboratively designed with direct input from committee members. These cards have now been produced in print and will be distributed by David, ensuring their physical availability for outreach efforts.

The cards are strategically designed with **QR codes** that, when scanned, seamlessly direct individuals to a wealth of CHPC resources, including essential meeting information and broader statewide prevention and care resources. This digital linkage aims to **"demystify what is CHPC"** and make information **"super easy for people"** to access, thereby helping to combat the stigma associated with HIV.

The discussion also revisited and expanded upon effective strategies for the widespread dissemination of these cards. Suggested distribution locations included a diverse array of community settings such as farmers markets, clinics, and recovery centers. The importance of ensuring these cards are readily accessible to members, enabling them to **"blast it out"** into their respective communities, was underscored as a crucial step in maximizing outreach and awareness.

A specific technical point was raised regarding the Spanish QR code on the cards, which initially led to an English-only CHPC website. However, it was clarified that the CHPC website itself provides a built-in function to change the language.

**YOUTH SUBCOMMITTEE PLANNING**

A significant agenda item involved the presentation of a proposal to re-establish a dedicated youth subcommittee, building upon a successful precedent when such a committee was actively engaged between 2011 and 2016. The presence of Blaise Gilchrist, a former member of the original youth committee, was highlighted, and he was encouraged to share historical insights into the activities and contributions of that prior group. Blaise Gilchrist recounted that the previous youth committee played an active role in disseminating HIV awareness information through various channels, including radio and artist-produced videos. Furthermore, youth members were regularly invited to and attended the main CHPC meetings, demonstrating a strong integration into the broader coalition's work and ensuring the youth's voice was heard.

Angel Ruiz said the core objective of reviving the subcommittee: to effectively integrate the **"next generation needs"** and a vital **"youth, young adult voice"** into the CHPC's strategic planning and operations. He emphasized the necessity for this initiative to be **"mutually beneficial,"** not only for the CHPC but, critically, for the young participants themselves, ensuring they benefit from participation. The aim is to empower young people to **"find their voice"** and clearly articulate their diverse needs, which extend beyond conventional basic necessities such as medical care, bus passes, or food, recognizing that there are **"other stuff"** and varied priorities that need to be addressed.

To bring this vision to life, several next steps for the subcommittee's development were outlined:

- **Identifying "champions" within public high schools:** The focus is on schools with allied health pathways, where students may already possess familiarity with HIV through health fairs and presentations. These champions would be instrumental in disseminating information and awareness, potentially leveraging modern communication methods like text messages and TikTok, as they are adept at reaching their peers.



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- **Connecting with youth-focused organizations:** Specific mention was made of establishing partnerships with entities such as the **Boys and Girls Clubs of New Year** to broaden outreach efforts and engage diverse youth populations effectively.
- **Engaging key youth navigators:** Taylor from CHS was suggested as a crucial contact. Described as a "youthful navigator" who runs virtual groups, Taylor is well-positioned to connect with young people, allowing more experienced committee members to avoid being the sole face of youth engagement efforts.

### ANNOUNCEMENTS, NEXT STEPS, AND MEETING FEEDBACK

As the meeting neared its conclusion, attendees were formally requested to **complete a survey for the committee**, emphasizing the importance of their feedback for ongoing improvements. A key logistical announcement was that **while there would be no committee meeting in August, a session is indeed planned for July**. The overall sentiment regarding the meeting was highly positive, with members expressing that all necessary topics had been covered comprehensively and extending their appreciation to the organizers for a productive session.

Next steps for the committee include:

- Incorporating newsletter edits.
- Launching the social media toolkit.
- Addressing feedback on the youth proposal.

Participants thanked the leaders and expressed gratitude as the meeting concluded.

### ATTENDANCE

Africka Hinds, Angel Ruiz, Blaise Gilchrist, Carl Ferris, Charles Hardy, Clifford Batson, David Reyes, Delita Rose-Daniels, Jordan Wynn, Kashia Lynch, Keith Taylor, Lauren Beaudry, Monique Davis, Nilda Lebron, Reggie Knox, Ruby Rios, Thomas Alfano, Victor Acevado

### FEEDBACK

Summary Table from Interactive Meeting Feedback Poll (n=14)				
Questions		Yes	No	Unsure
1	CHPC Member?	50%	50%	*
2	The agenda was clear and used through the meeting	93%	7%	*
3	I understood meeting information and materials	100%	*	*
4	The meeting felt inclusive and respectful	100%	*	*
5	The event was well organized overall	100%	*	*
6	One word to describe your committee experience: very good; long; inclusive, caring; wonderful; wonderful; informative; informative; productive; pleasant; engaging; inclusive; inspirational; excellent			
7	I like the best: its open my eye; breakourt meeting + presentation; brainstorming, ideas, teamwork; agenda; interaction; the insistence on crowd participation; how interesting the newsletter was created; friendly, everyone involved; open, comfortable sharing; everyone participated; open interaction amongst the group; the clarity of the panelist			

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8	<b>Suggestions for improvement:</b> some of it; unsure; N/A; N/A; none; stick to timelines a bit more; none; none, more time; nothing; better location to meet... not the lobby; more time to meet. I feel that we always run out of time when conversations and brainstorming is occurring; none
9	<b>Additional comments for CHPC leadership:</b> member; NA; N/A; N/A; no; N/A; N/A; none; nothing; It was wonderful to meet in person. I missed the last meeting in New Haven but I am really glad I came today.; N/A

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