

Public Awareness & Community Engagement (PACE) Committee Meeting Summary

November 19, 2025

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| Date: | Wednesday, November 17, 2025 | Type: | In-Person, Chrysalis Center |
| Start Time: | 10:30 a.m. | End Time: | 12:00 p.m. |
| Leaders | Angel H. Ruiz & Reggie Knox (Co-Chairs), Jenny Bobadilla-Pincos (CT Department of Public Health Resource Liaison) | | |
| Participants: | 16 | Next Meeting: | January 2026 (In-Person) |

MEETING OBJECTIVES

- Reflect on 2025: Review accomplishments and challenges
- Plan for 2026: Identify priorities and opportunities
- January Newsletter Planning: Community stories meet the Integrated Plan
- Approve September meeting summary
- Share announcements and complete feedback

WELCOME & MINDFUL MINUTE

The meeting opened with introductions where participants shared their names, organizations, and something positive they wanted to accomplish during the week. Highlights include:

- **Lauren Beaudry** (HRA of New Britain): Walk 2 miles by the end of week
- **Mike Judd** (CTHRC): Make it to Friday
- **Clifford Batson** (Co-Chair, Ryan White Planning Council): Looking forward to heading home
- **Chloe Johnson** (Ryan White A&B, HIV & Aging Project): 5 exercises by the end of the week
- **Blaise Gilchirst** (UConn Health): Buy gift cards for clients
- **Carl Ferris** (Community Member): Looking forward to Thanksgiving with family
- **Charles Hardy** (Community Member): Tackle grocery shopping (the chore he hates the most)
- **Tom Alfano** (Project TLC): Get school assignments done
- **Ruby Rios** (Project TLC): Winding down from a busy week
- **Sheryl John** (Public Health Intern, Town of South Windsor): Food safety initiative for the holidays
- **Catherine Canales** (Stamford Cares): Looking forward to Saturday

Following introductions, the group participated in a mindful minute to center themselves before beginning the agenda.

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

September Meeting Summary Approval

The September 2025 meeting summary was presented for approval. **Motion to approve** was made and seconded. The summary was **approved with no abstentions**.

Committee Updates

Meeting Format Changes for 2026: Angel Ruiz announces that starting in January 2026, PACE will transition to **60-minute meetings held before the main CHPC session** for the first five months of the year. This change aims to:

- Keep meetings focused and action-oriented
- Address post-lunch fatigue and participation challenges
- Maintain strong engagement during an important planning period

Newsletter Update: The committee celebrated that the Fall 2025 Newsletter has been finalized and distributed, and is available in **English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole**. The newsletter will be distributed through:

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- CHPC website
- Email listservs
- Agency networks
- Community distribution channels

Connection to HIV Integrated Plan Development

Jenny emphasized that PACE's work – especially the newsletter – will play a key role in supporting the **2027-2031 Connecticut Integrated HIV Prevention and Care Plan** development process. The committee's focus on community voice and engagement directly addresses:

- **Goal 1:** Reduce new HIV infections by 2026 (*awareness campaigns and initiatives*)
- **Goal 2:** Achieve increased viral load suppression rates (*awareness campaigns and initiatives*)
- **Goal 3:** Reduce HIV-related disparities and health inequities (*broaden membership*)
- **Goal 4:** Achieve integrated, coordinated efforts across community partners (*flexible, timely, responsive awareness campaigns + broadening membership*)

2025 REFLECTION & REVIEW

Best of 2025: Accomplishments

The co-chairs presented major accomplishments from 2025, and members used cards to identify what they were most proud of and what should be highlighted to the full CHPC.

Key Accomplishments Identified:

- 1. Published Fall 2025 Newsletter in Three Languages**
 - a. English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole
 - b. Strong collaboration across committee members
 - c. Featured personal interviews/stories that were relatable and accessible
 - d. Incorporated social media elements (QR codes) to reach tech-savvy audiences
- 2. Created Bilingual Outreach Cards**
 - a. Distributed throughout the community
 - b. Available in English and Spanish
 - c. Included resources and contact information
- 3. Launched Social Media Resource Folder**
 - a. Centralized repository for tested materials
 - b. Allows agencies statewide to share and replicate successful content
 - c. Provides proper attribution to creating agencies
- 4. Advanced Youth Subcommittee Planning**
 - a. Stakeholder outreach initiated
 - b. Framework developed for youth engagement (ages 17-24)
- 5. Maintained Strong Committee Participation**
 - a. Despite leadership transitions and external challenges
 - b. Sustained engagement through uncertain times
- 6. Successfully navigated Committee Merger**
 - a. Combined Membership & Awareness and Positive Prevention Committees
 - b. Integrated two groups into cohesive PACE structure

Member Feedback Highlights:

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- **Lauren Beaudry:** “I thought the best thing was the collaboration that went into making the newsletter. We were all pretty happy about the outcome.”
- **Multiple Members:** Praised the outreach cards for being practical and distributable across diverse settings.
- **Catherine Canales:** Appreciated seeing the Social Media Resource Folder as a way to share Stamford’s work and align efforts statewide
- **Several Members:** Highlighted the newsletter’s personal story/interview format as accessible and relatable rather than just presenting facts
- **Committee Discussion:** Emphasized the value of expanding to additional languages, with **Portuguese and Polish** identified as potential priorities based on community demographics

Challenges We Faced in 2025

The committee honestly assessed obstacles encountered throughout the year.

Challenges Identified:

1. **Newsletter Delays**
 - a. Originally planned for summer, published in fall/winter
 - b. Due to shifting priorities, capacity constraints, and content discussions
 - c. Funding and policy changes affected campaign timelines
2. **Campaign Limitations**
 - a. Some awareness campaigns paused due to evolving guidance
 - b. Capacity and resource constraints
3. **Social Media Resource Folder Adoption**
 - a. Submissions lower than hoped
 - b. Need for increased promotion and engagement
4. **Youth Subcommittee Timeline**
 - a. Still in planning phase
 - b. Recruitment has taken longer than anticipated
5. **Capacity Constraints**
 - a. Follow-through between meetings challenging
 - b. Feeling burned out and stretched thin
 - c. “Everything happening in the world” affecting energy and focus
6. **Committee Merger Complexity**
 - a. Maintaining consistent focus across two previously separate groups
 - b. Balancing different priorities and working styles
7. **Leadership Transition**
 - a. Co-chair change required adjustment period
 - b. Fortunately, Angel stepped up to lead alongside Reggie
8. **External Factors**
 - a. Events beyond the committee’s control shaped work
 - b. World events affecting members capacity and wellbeing

Solutions Proposed:

- **Meeting Outside Committee Time:** Several members suggested creating surveys or additional brief check-ins to gather input when 60-90 minutes isn't sufficient for complex projects like newsletter content
- **Increased Promotion:** Better visibility for Social Media Resource Folder, including featuring it prominently in newsletters and on the CHPC website homepage

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- **Clearer Instructions:** Simplify submission processes and provide better guidance

Opportunities for 2026

The committee identified forward-looking priorities for the coming year.

2026 Priorities Confirmed:

1. **January Newsletter: Integrated Plan + Community Stories**
 - a. Merge community voices with technical planning requirements
 - b. Show how the Integrated Plan lives in real people's experiences
 - c. Include participation information and timelines
2. **Youth Subcommittee Launch**
 - a. Finalize structure and recruit members (ages 17-24)
 - b. Provide mentorship and leadership development
 - c. Create pathways for youth voice in CHPC work
3. **Social Media Resource Folder Enhancement**
 - a. Increase submissions and engagement
 - b. Promote more widely across networks
 - c. Consider additional distribution channels
4. **Support Integrated Plan Development**
 - a. Facilitate community input opportunities
 - b. Communicate about surveys, focus groups, meetings
 - c. Translate technical planning into accessible information
5. **Maintain Strong PACE Participation**
 - a. Continue building membership
 - b. Support member engagement and retention
6. **Clarify Committee Structure**
 - a. Ensure focused, sustainable work processes
 - b. Adapt to new 60-minute meeting format
7. **Align Awareness Work with Current Guidance**
 - a. Focus on campaigns and initiatives that align with evolving priorities

Additional Ideas Raised:

- **Resource-Rick Newsletter Section:** Include links to Social Media Resource Folder with guide on how to navigate resources
- **Accessibility Enhancements:** Create materials accessible for people with disabilities, including blind/visually impaired community members (audio versions, screen-reader compatibility)
- **Online Application Process:** Streamline membership applications with accessible online forms
- **Agency Distribution Networks:** Distribute applications and information through partner agency meetings

Recruitment Strategies for Youth and New Members:

The committee discussed multiple avenues for expanding participation:

- **Colleges:** UConn (Storrs and Hartford campuses), community colleges
- **Pride Centers:** New Haven Pride Center and similar organizations

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- **GSA/LGBTQ+ Groups:** School-based groups, particularly in areas with limited CHPC representation (e.g., Windham County)
- **Bars, Clubs, Libraries:** Community gathering spaces
- **Faith-Based Organizations:** Youth groups at churches and religious institutions
- **Allied Health Programs:** High school health career programs
- **CTHRA Testing Sites:** Leveraging existing connections with youth populations

Incentives for Youth Participation:

- Resume-building opportunity
- Volunteer hours (high school requirement credit)
- Internship credit where applicable
- Mentorship from long-term survivors and professionals
- Leadership development pathway
- Networking opportunities

JANUARY 2026 NEWSLETTER PLANNING

How We Got Here

Angel and Jenny explained the evolution of the January newsletter concept:

Original Plan (September): Community stories from volunteers about PrEP, recovery, wellness, and lived experience

What Changed: The Executive team requested a focus on the Integrated Plan development process to support the 2027-2031 planning cycle

The Compromise: We're doing BOTH! Personal stories will connect to Plan pillars and goals to show how the Plan lives in real people's experiences – not just on paper.

Newsletter Content Structure

Overview Section

- What is the Integrated Plan, and why does it matter?
- Brief, accessible explanation for general audiences

Community Stories Aligned with Four Pillars

Each story connects personal experience to one of the Integrated Plan's four pillars:

1. **Pillar 1 (Prevent):** Monique Davis
 - a. Topic: PrEP from a straight woman's perspective
 - b. Addresses misconception that PrEP is only for gay men
 - c. Discusses dating and relationship safety for women
2. **Pillar 2 (Treat):** Danielle Warren-Dias
 - a. Topic: Recovery, wellness, and staying in care
 - b. Focuses on substance use recovery journey while maintaining HIV care
3. **Pillar 3 (Respond):** Chrissy Marie Ely
 - a. Topic: Recovery and comprehensive care
 - b. Personal recovery story and support systems
4. **Pillar 4 (Diagnose):** Mike Judd

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- a. Topic: Diagnosis and testing response [pending confirmation of specific focus]
- b. Syringe service programs and harm reduction work

Plan Participation Information

- Timeline for community input opportunities
- How to get involved: surveys, focus groups, meetings
- How updates will be shared and input will be used
- Contact information for questions

Visual Elements

- Infographics from existing Plan materials
- QR codes for easy access to resources
- Potential incorporation of Social Media Resource Folder highlights

Key Discussion Points

Accessibility and Audience

A newer member (Sheryl, public health intern from South Windsor) provided valuable "fresh eyes" perspective, noting that newsletters sometimes feel more geared toward HIV service providers than community members. The committee discussed:

- Need for clearer headers and calls-to-action for general audiences
- More prominent information on how to access testing/services
- Balance between professional content and community-friendly messaging
- Avoiding overly bureaucratic language about the planning process

Making the Plan Feel Relevant:

Committee members emphasized that the Integrated Plan can feel abstract and technical. Strategies discussed:

- Lead with personal stories, then connect to Plan goals
- Use plain language throughout
- Show concrete examples of how Plan goals affect real people's lives
- Include voices from diverse populations beyond LGBTQ+ communities
- Address common myths (e.g., "HIV is over," "you can tell by looking at someone")

Awareness and Education Gaps

Several members shared experiences highlighting ongoing education needs:

- **Clifford Batson:** Even in medical settings (downtown Hartford hospitals, colleges), many people don't know what PrEP is
- **Reggie Knox:** "Black and brown people have the highest rate of new infections" - need targeted, culturally relevant messaging
- **Blaise Gilchrist:** "We exist in silos; despite constant access" to information, correct information doesn't always reach people
- **Jenny Bobadilla-Pincos:** "We have the most credible information and should feel compelled to share"

Distribution and Format Ideas

Beyond standard listserv distribution, members suggested:

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- **QR Code Placards:** For waiting rooms instead of full printed newsletters
- **Audio Narration:** Accessibility feature where authors read their articles (members volunteered to record)
- **Video Components:** Consider future multimedia elements
- **Interactive Digital Version:** Clickable links and flipbook-style format
- **Multi-Language Audio:** Exploring translated audio versions

Timeline

- **End of November:** Draft content developed
- **Early December:** PACE review & feedback (virtual check-in or email)
- **Mid-December:** Final edits and translation
- **Mid-January 2026:** Publication and distribution

The committee confirmed this timeline works, with the understanding that December holidays may require flexibility.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS & UPDATES

World AIDS Day Planning

Carl Ferris mentioned upcoming World AIDS Day events and outreach activities. Other members shared their agency plans for community engagement around the December 1st observance.

Youth Subcommittee Outreach

Carl Ferris confirmed he'll distribute youth recruitment materials through the Pride Center in New Haven and other connected organizations.

Angel Ruiz committed to sending members:

- Letter of invitation for youth (ages 17-24)
- Flyer explaining benefits and expectations
- Information on how youth can benefit (resume building, volunteer hours, networking)
- Information on how they benefit CHPC (bringing fresh perspectives, tech-savvy insights)

Mike Judd confirmed he'll promote youth opportunities through UConn testing sites and can reach college-age populations.

Blaise Gilchrist indicated interest in working on youth subcommittee development.

Social Media Resource Folder Promotion

Multiple members committed to:

- Sharing the folder link through their agency communication channels
- Encouraging colleagues to both use AND submit materials
- Featuring the folder more prominently on partner websites

Catherine (Stamford Cares) specifically noted she'd like to see the folder integrated on partner websites and will work with her team on submissions.

Agency Updates

Members shared brief updates on their organizations' work, though no major announcements were made. The focus remained on collaborative PACE efforts rather than individual agency spotlights.

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NEXT STEPS & KEY DATES

- **Immediate Actions (November/December 2025):**
 - End of November: January newsletter draft content completed by contributors
 - Early December: PACE members review the draft and provide feedback
 - Mid-December: Final edits, translations, and design completed
- **January 2026:**
 - Mid-January: Newsletter publication and distribution
 - January (TBD): Next PACE Committee meeting
 - New format: 60-minute meeting before main CHPC session
 - Goal: Have 1-2 youth advisors present
- **Ongoing:**
 - Youth subcommittee recruitment continues
 - Social Media Resource Folder promotion
 - Fall newsletter distribution through expanded channels

ATTENDANCE

Angel Ruiz, Blaise Gilchrist, Carl Ferris, Catherine Canelas, Charles Hardy, Chloe Johnson, Clifford Batson, David Reyes, Fernanda Hernandez, Jenny Bobadilla-Pincos, Lauren Beaudry, Michael Judd, Reggie Knox, Ruby Rios, Sheryl John, Tom Alfano

ACTION ITEMS

- ☐ **Angel & Reggie:** Present 5-minute PACE update to full CHPC (afternoon session)
- ☐ **Angel Ruiz:** Distribute youth subcommittee recruitment materials (letter, flyer, benefits information) to members
- ☐ **David Reyes:**
 - Send follow-up email with Social Media Resource Folder links and submission form
 - Distribute January newsletter templates to content contributors
 - Coordinate the December virtual check-in or email review process
- ☐ **Content Contributors** (Monique Davis, Danielle Warren-Dias, Chrissy Marie Ely, Mike Judd)
 - Submit first drafts by the end of November
 - Participate in early December review process
- ☐ **All Members:**
 - Share Fall newsletter through agency networks
 - Promote Social Media Resource Folder
 - Identify and reach out to potential youth subcommittee members in your networks
 - Complete meeting feedback forms