

December 30, 2020

Dear Friends, Colleagues and Members,

I hope this message finds each and every one of you safe and healthy this holiday season. I can't believe it's been almost a year since the Coronavirus pandemic hit the US. As you know, the last nine months have been called "challenging" and "uncertain times." My sincere condolences to the families and loved ones of those who've passed in the wake of COVID-19. More Americans died this year from COVID than the total American deaths in all wars combined. So, for many folks, the pandemic has instilled fear and extreme isolation, and trauma has settled as a deep depression; we will surely see a dramatic increase in substance abuse/drug overdoses, medical distancing, as well as domestic violence - numbers that will be staggering all-time records.

The effects of the pandemic on our economy has caused a drastic rise in unemployment -- 300% more than the Great Depression with over 40 million evictions and foreclosures nationwide, which will only lead to an even larger population of individuals and families experiencing homelessness, greater food insecurities and limited access to wrap around services, much less their core medical needs.

Meanwhile, injustices of every kind have widened the cultural gaps across the US, and low-income families are barely getting an education. Although one silver lining of the Coronavirus pandemic is that HIV exposure and acquisition has been the lowest it's been in decades. My friends, I have just described and introduced to you all of the new patients we will be (and are now) serving in the RWP. Thank goodness "trauma-informed care" is a real thing.

While we didn't meet for three months in the Spring, BSR staff got us up and going on Zoom. And it was great while it lasted. I applaud each and every one of you, Partnership and all Committee members, for essentially doing an entire year's worth of work in five months -- and during a global crisis. Now, after two more months of no meetings, BSR staff has readied us for the new year; we are getting back to work, doing the good work we do, just differently.

Notices have gone out, letting everyone know that meetings are now streamlined down to nothing but basically motions that need to be voted on. Meetings will require a quorum of in-person attendees. Members who are unable to attend any in-person meeting can attend virtually, but **MUST** submit a signed form/waiver to staff before the deadline. And finally, sign-in, reports and announcements will all be digital. If you have any questions, concerns, or need services or assistance, do not hesitate to check the Partnership website www.aidsnet.org (updated daily) or reach out to the BSR staff directly.

I hope you got your exercise and rest, because The Partnership will be back in full force in 10 days time and blowing up social media. We need to re-imagine everything, create new opportunities, *and* save lives. We can face the challenges ahead, if we do so together. I mean, there's no way we worked as hard as we have for 40 years only to let COVID get the best of us. Be strong, stay safe. Gratitude and Blessings,

Travis Neff
Chair, Miami-Dade HIV/AIDS Partnership & Ryan White Planning Council
Patient Care Representative, Florida Comprehensive Planning Network

