

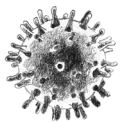
# Harm Reduction History: Queer & Trans Roots

**“The emergence of HIV/AIDS and the way in which the queer community chose to care for one another popularized many of the harm reduction models still used today.”**

**-JAY HOGAN, 08/23/22, VOLTEFACE**

Harm reduction is a practical and compassionate approach to the needs of people who use drugs. Although eliminating the negative consequences of drug use is not always possible, we CAN reduce the risks.

We embrace harm reduction because we believe in meeting people where they are, and without judgment or discrimination.



In the 1980s HIV/AIDS was killing drug users, BIPOC, & LGBTQ+ people, and the US government failed to protect our community. Stigma hindered effective advocacy for HIV treatment and limited crucial information about the virus and how to prevent it.

Recognizing the urgency of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, many sex workers, queer and trans people, and others joined together to fight the spread of HIV/AIDS. They organized many harm reduction resources by distributing free condoms and syringes, and also vital HIV/AIDS information in an informal and accessible way.



**The grassroots political group ACT UP! was founded in New York City in 1987 in response to the HIV/AIDS crisis.** ACT UP! laid the groundwork for many harm reduction practices that continue to save lives today like condom distribution, community education, and syringe exchange!



## Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow: Queer and Trans People in Harm Reduction

Trans people who use drugs do not always have access to the same services as others. Many inpatient drug treatment programs, recovery housing, and domestic violence shelters are segregated by gender. When trans people are limited to services that are not thoughtful about their gender identity, those services are not accessible.

**“[Trans people] are the experts on their life, if you give them the freedom and the space and the support to be able to express that to you, they will be much more able to have agency to help themselves with any decision they need to make.”**

**-ROBYN LEARNED, 07/10/19, FILTER MAG**

Our team at NEXT includes many queer and trans people who are also BIPOC. We are motivated by our understanding and insight into the barriers and challenges faced by our own community and other marginalized communities. These unique perspectives and experiences help us create safe, inclusive, and effective spaces for people who use drugs.

By actively fighting for personal autonomy, challenging stigma and discrimination, and creating inclusive environments we can all work towards a more equitable society that promotes the well-being of all.

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“Annually we converge based on shared love between us, and overwhelming hate and violence against us. In harm reduction and advocacy work, it is important to remember the common theme that binds drug users, TGNC, Black, Native and other POC lives together... Our being pushed to the fringes of society with the intention of mass suffering and death. As our rebuttal, **we form communities and networks to keep one another alive for just one more day.** The lives we lead are not the ones we choose, but they are the ones we are thrust into. We face abandonment via the state and austere conditions we have become all too familiar with. In claiming our autonomy over our genders and sexualities, we gain just a small inkling of freedom. I have always been this way-even when I did not have the words to explain it... Even when I knew no one else existed like myself. I ask that individuals who engage with NEXT, truly internalize my words when I say that **we will not settle for a life of slow, impending death.** Not drug users, not TGNC individuals, and especially not those who can check both boxes. We have seen enough suffering and dysphoria, it is time to fight for our lives and for the actual relinquishing of the chains.”

- **PRESTO CRESPO, 2023, NEXT, COORDINATOR OF SUPPORT SERVICES**

NEXT Distro continues to build upon decades of advocacy for people who use drugs. Even in 2023, syringe exchange is not legal in all states in the U.S., NEXT provides harm reduction supplies by mail in these states in an act of civil disobedience.

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## **GLOSSARY**

**BIPOC** – Black, Indigenous and people of color

**TGNC** – Trans and gender non-conforming

**POC** – Person of color

**Queer** – A sexuality and umbrella term for LGBTQ+ people

**Stigma** – A negative and unfair belief or judgment held against certain individuals or groups. It often leads to discrimination or treating them differently because of something they cannot control or that society considers as outside of the norm

