40th Anniversary of the First Reported AIDS Cases
Recognizing HIV Long-Term Survivors Day and National HIV Testing Day

DETROIT, Michigan June 5, 2021 - Forty years ago, on June 5, 1981, the Centers for Disease Control’s Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report described five cases of Pneumocystis pneumonia in gay men. This report was to be the first of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which has resulted in over 75 million HIV infections and 32 million deaths.

UNIFIED - HIV Health and Beyond (UNIFIED) board, leadership and staff observe and remember this pivotal moment in history. With this reflection comes a resolve to recommit to a mission and set of values molded by the two former grassroots organizations that now make up UNIFIED. AIDS Partnership Michigan and HIV/AIDS Resource Center were established in the early 1980’s to address the emerging epidemic in the Metro Detroit area. Volunteers and staff selflessly spearheaded the response locally and created a presence that would eventually be recognized nationally for its impact.

As a result of those same grassroots efforts here and around the world, and the remarkable fortitude of individuals living with HIV, we have the opportunity to observe HIV Long-Term Survivors Day, held in the U.S. each year on June 5. Twenty-five percent of people living with HIV in the U.S. represent the long-term survivors who have persevered for decades in the face of stigma, fear, medical and societal barriers and uncertainty. While we consider the past today, we must also look to the needs of long-term survivors and find solutions to the challenges and barriers, old and new, they are forced to address.

To further highlight the importance of this historic month, National HIV Testing Day is held each year on June 27 to encourage HIV testing. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that of the approximately 1.2 million people living with HIV in the U.S. nearly one in eight (more than 161,000 people) do not know they have HIV; a result of the barriers to testing, fear, inadequate sexual health education and stigma still present today. Testing efforts are paramount if we wish to end the pandemic as we now know that individuals living with HIV who achieve viral suppression and an undetectable viral load through treatment have effectively no risk of transmitting HIV through sex.

Please join us in reflecting on the past, advocating for those who have survived over the years and pushing forward with efforts to end the HIV pandemic.

Leanne F. Savola, President