



IN THE SPOTLIGHT



An Oral History: 30 Years of APLA Dental Services

In 1985, thousands of people in Los Angeles were feeling the devastating impacts of the AIDS epidemic on a daily basis, and the terms “HIV” and “AIDS” inspired fear both inside and outside the LGBT community.

That fear pervaded the medical and dental worlds, as well. Those who were HIV-positive would often not disclose their status to their doctors and dentists for fear of being shunned and/or denied service, and many were falling ill and dying without the care—and respect—they deserved. HIV-positive dental patients in particular would all too often be asked to leave if they revealed their status. Sometimes they would receive treatment but were isolated from the rest of the public by being moved to back rooms, and after their visit staff would throw away their dental instruments.

AIDS Project Los Angeles looked to change that and to ensure that people living with HIV or AIDS had access to quality oral health care. “The concept for the dental clinic was created in 1984 by Ron LeBaron, Raymond Green, and me, with primary assistance from members of the Dental Society for Human Rights, Los Angeles County, and APLA,” Jon Bauer, co-founder of APLA’s dental program, recalls. “Ray, Ron, and I were also founding board members of the Dental Society for Human Rights, which was a social and educational support group for lesbian and gay dentists.”

With a small number of volunteer dentists, APLA launched its “dental practice” in March 1985, opening the first clinic in the country for those with HIV/AIDS in a wood-paneled trailer in West Hollywood Park. From the outset, the going was both rough and rewarding, as providing dental care happened alongside battling fear, stigma, poverty, and discrimination, as well as educating the professional dental community.

Eventually, the trailer gave way to the bona fide Green-LeBaron Dental Clinic, and over the next three decades, APLA’s dental program has continued to expand and evolve to meet the crucial needs of thousands of patients. Today, it includes 18 dental chairs in four locations: the Wilshire Dental Clinic near downtown; a mobile dental van that addresses dental needs of clients all over the county; the S. Mark Taper Foundation dental clinic in South L.A.; and the Gleicher/Chen Health Center in Baldwin Hills. As of 2014, APLA Health & Wellness offers dental services to everyone, regardless of their HIV status.

What follows below is a compendium of quotes from the people who have been a part of the first 30 years of APLA’s dental services.

Due to space limitations we could not include all stories and quotes we would have liked. If you have your own memories to share, please send them to us at communications@apla.org.

“Our clients in the mid-’80s presented with multiple health needs, and though most doctors were willing to see them, most dentists were not. The fear of infection was palpable, and though we sponsored educational programs about the infectious process, we just weren’t able to cut through it—even with the medical training required of dentists, oral surgeons, and hygienists. When we decided to take this on as a temporary measure, it was even hard for us to find a landlord willing to rent space, and we ended up buying a trailer and converting it into the first dental clinic.”

—Matt Redman, co-founder of APLA

“When APLA began dental services in West Hollywood in 1985, dentists would literally not treat people with AIDS due to the stigma and for fear of being infected. Our clinic was the first in the nation and the only place in Los Angeles County where people living with HIV or AIDS could access dental services. Breaking down that barrier, the clinical community developing universal precautions, and our clinic showing that dentistry could be practiced safely was a major breakthrough in the fair and nonjudgmental treatment of people with HIV/AIDS. Even after many dentists became comfortable with the risks they would not treat our clients because of homophobia, racism, or classism and because they had Denti-Cal or no insurance. So we remained one of the only places in Los Angeles for low-income people living with HIV for quite some time.”

—Craig E. Thompson, CEO, APLA and APLA Health & Wellness

“I was taught that a general dentist would see one oral cancer lesion in his entire career. I was seeing hundreds. ... I was sending patients to their MDs and most became ill and died within six months. I was no longer just a general dentist. I was not trained for this, but we all became soldiers with hearts for weapons.”

—Jon Bauer, co-founder of APLA’s Dental Services Program

“In the late ’80s six patients in a single dentist office in Florida acquired HIV and that incident exacerbated what was already a widespread refusal of dental providers to provide care to HIV-positive people. In fact, today there is still a high refusal of HIV-positive patients. Stigma is still a problem.”

—Phil Curtis, director of government affairs and former benefits specialist

“The dental program has grown in great proportion since I started in 1995. But now we have more up-to-date equipment and more practitioners to take care of all of our patients.”

—Jerry Bostre, dental hygienist

"Patients have time after time thanked APLA and the staff here for our services and are thankful for bringing their confidence and smile back. Since joining APLA back in June of 2008, working for the dental program has certainly been the most rewarding job I have ever had. ... APLA has definitely brought a whole new level of services to the community and I'm proud to be part of it."

—*Angie Barajas, office manager*

"APLA's dental services literally gave me my smile back. The staff has been like family to me. When I [see them] we always laugh and have a good time. Who says it's not fun going to the dentist?"

—*Lejon Stewart, patient*

"Who knew that, even though dentists finally relented, the disease became almost synonymous with poverty—and race—and the inability of AIDS patients to afford or access health care, making dental services a crucial necessity. So our tiny little two-chair clinic became what is now three dental clinics and a mobile dental van."

—*Matt Redman, co-founder of APLA*

"Serving all of these patients, being acknowledged for just touching an infected person, or sitting and listening to them, as well as cleaning and restoring their teeth, became my path to healing. They were serving me as much as I was serving them. We met and employed future assistants and hygienists who saw this level of care as their personal and professional path. They began to experience their professional lives from a higher place and purpose as a result of the virus."

—*Jon Bauer, co-founder of APLA's Dental Services Program*

"In the future, I think you'll see our dental program will become very well-known throughout Los Angeles as we extend services for patients with and without HIV—something that just started last year. In our 30 years of providing dental services, friends and relatives of our existing clients have consistently asked us if they would be able to receive services, too. At last, we can finally say 'Yes.' I also see our dental program as a leader and pioneer in the industry. We are not afraid to expand to territories where others may have reservations. We welcome the people that others may neglect or reject. Our history proves it."

—*Steven Vitero, Medical Director, Dental Services, APLA Health & Wellness (present)*

NEWS & NOTEWORTHY



What a Difference a Year Makes

Summer is officially drawing to a close (though all of us in L.A. know summer usually lasts here until October), and we are gearing up for a busy fall. That means that [AIDS Walk](#) is just around the corner. This year marks the 31st annual walk, and we're looking forward to joining over 20,000 walkers and supporters in West Hollywood Park the morning of October 11 to kick off this always-inspiring event. Thank you to all of you who have already registered. If you have not yet done so, there's still plenty of time to sign up at the brand-new [AIDS Walk website](#). Let's work—and walk—together to end the epidemic.

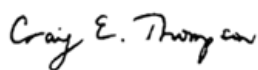
Speaking of anniversaries, 2015 also marks the [30th year of our dental services program](#). What began with just a few volunteer dentists seeing HIV-positive patients in a humble trailer in a West Hollywood park is today a full-service program that serves patients regardless of their HIV status at three locations in L.A. County as well as in our mobile dental van. We are grateful to all of our dentists, hygienists, staff, and volunteers who helped transform care for HIV-positive patients over the last three decades and literally transform lives in the process. We're proud of our history of offering the first-of-its-kind dental clinic in 1985—and proud to continue expanding our dental program to bring excellent care to the LGBT community at large.

I must make note of another important anniversary, as well. October 1 marks the official one-year anniversary of the opening of the completely remodeled [Gleicher/Chen Health Center](#) (GCHC) in Baldwin Hills. Over the last 11 months, we have seen thousands of patients for medical, dental, and behavioral health care services, prevention and education programs, and increasing numbers of individuals who want to learn more about pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), thanks to our [Pendleton/Goldman PrEP Program](#).

One big piece of news perfectly timed for GCHC's anniversary is the opening of a new Walgreen's pharmacy next door to the health center this October. The pharmacy is a true convenience for our patients, who will now be able to walk literally only steps to pick up their medicines. The pharmacy will be open for limited service starting in October, expanding shortly thereafter.

We look at all of this—from 30 years of providing life-enhancing dental services to one year of having a true "one-stop shop" health center serving the community—and remain thankful that your support makes it all possible. APLA and APLA Health & Wellness would not have made it this far without you—whether you walk with us every year, donate your time, or give so generously. We'll be keeping you updated on the other exciting developments that you help make possible.

With gratitude,



Craig E. Thompson
Chief Executive Officer
APLA, APLA Health & Wellness



Getting to Know ... R3VNG

Supporting and Educating Young Gay Men of Color in Los Angeles

One of APLA Health & Wellness' most prominent outreach and education programs is R3VNG, an acronym for "Reshaping 3 letters through the Voices of the Now Generation." Those three letters are "HIV," and the program engages young gay men of color, ages 18-29, encouraging dialogue not only about HIV but also the other things that may put them at risk.

We recently chatted with Program Coordinator Dontá Morrison (pictured, center) about how R3VNG got started, a new grant from the CDC, and much more.

How did R3VNG get started, and how has it evolved?

R3VNG has evolved from a local meeting for young gay men to a nationally recognized presence that highlights the challenges faced by young gay men of color. We are no longer viewed as simply a place to get an HIV test. We have established our name in the community as a program that offers a vast array of services for the betterment of young gay men of color.

The CDC recently awarded the R3VNG program a five-year, \$1.75 million grant. How did that feel? What do you want to accomplish over the next five years?

We were elated. During our last funding cycle we were able to establish ourselves within the community via various outreach strategies. The new award allows us to continue that work and introduce new innovations to the community. We want R3VNG to be a one-stop-shop for assistance with some of the other challenges these young men face, like unemployment, homelessness, education, and mental and spiritual challenges.

We will link people to life-changing opportunities that can build self-esteem and motivate them to live their best life. We have created several partnerships that will strengthen and enable us to assist out-of-work youth with tools needed to survive in the workforce. We are also building bridges with faith-based institutions that are willing to assist with the spiritual needs of our community.

Additionally, we want to create a vibrant group for HIV-positive young men where they can express their fears and concerns about living with the virus and learn valuable life lessons from guest speakers.

You launched the "Truth B Told" web series a couple of years ago to showcase young men talking about some of the topics you mentioned previously. Can we expect new episodes? Will the format stay the same?

There will be new episodes. We are also in the process of brainstorming new ways to deliver the show. It will still be the same raw, in-your-face dialogue, but we might make some changes like filming in different locations and inviting guests.

Is there anything else you think people should know about you or the program?

I would just like people to know that young gay men of color are definitely concerned and involved in HIV prevention efforts more than they're often given credit for. Unfortunately, we see mostly bad news and statistics instead of the countless youth who volunteer their time and efforts to help share messaging about the importance of HIV prevention. I just want everyone to stop and take time to applaud those unsung heroes who pass out condoms, assist in linkage-to-care efforts, share information about PEP and PrEP, and do what they can to further educate their peers about the importance of HIV education and prevention.

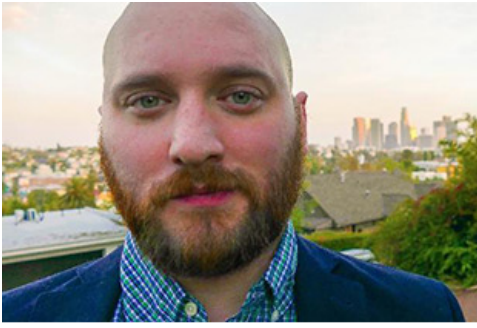
For more information about R3VNG, visit aplahw.org or the [R3VNG Facebook page](#).



Get Ready for AIDS Walk October 11!

AIDS Walk Los Angeles is only a month away! But it's not too late for you to sign up raise funds to assist thousands of Angelenos who are living with HIV/AIDS. By joining this year's walk, you help APLA and APLA Health & Wellness provide life-saving and -enhancing programs and services, including medical, dental, and behavioral health care, our Vance North Necessities of Life Program food pantries, HIV testing, STD screening, PrEP counseling and management, housing assistance, benefits counseling, and so much more.

[Sign up today](#) and we'll see you in West Hollywood Park on October 11!



Volunteer Spotlight: Covering the Bases—From Clientline to Communications

Jason Qualls moved to Los Angeles from Bloomington, IN, in 2014, while in the midst of finishing his PhD in communication. Los Angeles was the first big city he'd lived in, and he was excited by the opportunity to volunteer with an organization that made a difference in the community. "I grew up in very small towns in the Midwest without a lot of ways to get involved in the HIV/AIDS effort," he explains. "When I moved here, I just Googled 'Los Angeles AIDS volunteer' and soon found myself at APLA."

Jason began volunteering with APLA's Clientline in August 2014 and a few months later became curious about communication-related work in a non-academic, nonprofit setting. To find out, he doubled his volunteer time beginning in February, splitting days between Clientline and the Communications department at APLA's David Geffen Center. "Doing work in both client services and 'upstairs management' has made me so much more open-minded to the ins and outs of social service," he says. "A lot of people are working toward a common goal in many capacities, and the compassion and patience of the whole staff at APLA has influenced me in my own life."

Jason is not sure if he will continue his academic career once he completes his degree, but he will remain a dedicated supporter of and advocate for APLA—and especially of the people we serve—no matter where he ends up. "I've learned how many difficult challenges people living with HIV/AIDS face," he says, "but I've also learned about so many public resources available to people in need—resources that many clients also didn't know about before coming in to see us."

If you are interested in volunteer opportunities at APLA, please visit apla.org/get-involved/volunteer for more information.

PARTNER PROFILE



Kaiser Permanente: Making a Difference Locally Through Service and Education

We recently spoke with Celia A. Brugman (pictured), community benefit manager for Kaiser Permanente West Los Angeles Medical Center, and asked her to tell us a bit about why and how the organization partners with APLA and APLA Health & Wellness to improve overall health outcomes for those living in Los Angeles' underserved neighborhoods. Here she talks about how Kaiser Permanente chooses its partners and what the future looks like for health care on a local level.

What are the criteria Kaiser Permanente uses to select its partners/grantees?

Our Community Benefit program funds and supports not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organizations. We conduct a community health needs assessment every three years, where we utilize extensive community input to determine health needs and priorities within our service area. ... We are interested in long-term partnerships that can have a dramatic and measurable impact.

Kaiser Permanente has helped fund our oral health care and PrEP programs. Why does Kaiser Permanente see these as important to the community at large?

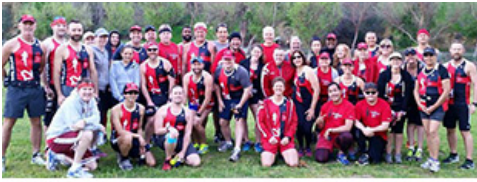
The oral health care program has provided HIV/AIDS patients with access to care for many years. We value the expertise, the high quality of service, and the commitment to serving these populations in need. APLA Health & Wellness' PrEP program will bring much-needed outreach and education to a population that experiences disproportionately high levels of HIV/AIDS and other negative health outcomes. ... There are clearly many barriers that exist for high-risk populations fully adopting this strategy. We believe education can make a huge difference.

What's the future of health care for underserved communities in L.A. and what role will Kaiser Permanente play to help ensure it is brighter?

As an immigrant myself I'm constantly amazed at the level of complexity of our health care system. And Los Angeles offers unique challenges given its large and diverse population. The Affordable Care Act has certainly provided needed access to many who did not previously have insurance, but we still see many uninsured people.

I think the future is brighter because the whole world of medicine is changing. There is a stronger realization that health care providers and communities need to coordinate efforts to impact the complex social determinants of health. I am confident that Kaiser Permanente will be at the forefront of the struggle for quality and comprehensive medical care and will be prepared to push these new approaches to the next level.

SAVE THE DATES



**L.A. Marathon Training Begins
September 12**

Join TEAM TO END AIDS (T2) as they kick off training for the 2016 L.A. Marathon—which will take place on Valentine's Day. Raise money for those living with HIV/AIDS and get in shape for a great cause!

Sign up here: apla.org/t2



**Walgreens Opens for Business
October**

Walgreens is slated to open a new pharmacy right next door to the Gleicher/Chen Health Center in Baldwin Hills this October—making health care services even easier for APLA Health & Wellness patients.



**RED
CIRCLE
PROJECT**

**Red Circle Project Community Awards
November 12**

In honor of Native Heritage Month, RCP will host the Community Awards and Role Model Showcase, honoring individuals and organizations doing important work in our community.

More information: facebook.com/redcircleproject



**Transgender Day of Remembrance
November 20**

Transgender Day of Remembrance takes place every year to honor those lost to us as a result of transphobia and to bring attention to violence endured by many in the trans* community.

Visit tdor.info this fall to learn about events taking place across the country.

We need you to volunteer with APLA!

For more information, contact Jim Williams, our Volunteer Resources program manager, at volunteer@apla.org or 213.201.1379.