



35th Anniversary of World AIDS Day Commemorated Through Powerful Conversations Around Bodily Autonomy at the National AIDS Memorial Grove

5-time Olympic medalist and LGBTQ+ activist Greg Louganis among those honored

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The National AIDS Memorial marks the 35th Anniversary of World AIDS Day with a series of powerful conversations which honor the history of the AIDS movement, highlight current progress and struggles, and provide hope for the future. On Friday, December 1, from Noon to 2 PM, featured speakers bring to life the faces and stories of the pandemic, which has taken the lives of 32 million people worldwide, and to offer hope and support to the 1.2 million people estimated to be living with HIV in the U.S. today. The annual World AIDS Day National Observance is free to the public and takes place at the National AIDS Memorial Grove in Golden Gate Park, located at the intersection of Nancy Pelosi Drive and Bowling Green Drive. The National AIDS Memorial Grove is the only federally designated memorial to the pandemic.

“We commemorate the 35th Anniversary of World AIDS Day by doing what we do best – uplifting the voices that contribute to the broader, intersectional narrative of health and social inequities that defines the AIDS movement,” says John Cunningham, Chief Executive Officer of the National AIDS Memorial. “Through brave conversations with those on the front lines, we seek to personalize and contextualize where we have been, where we are, and what remains to be done to fight stigma and discrimination and to build a more just, equitable, and healthy future for all people, in every community.”

Under a large tent situated in the heart of the National AIDS Memorial Grove, the day begins with a performance of Dance AZTECA, a living, evolving, cultural tradition using the artistic and spiritual traditions of the pre-Colombian Aztecs. An invocation and opening remarks will follow. Karl Schmid, television host and noted AIDS activist, will serve as emcee for the day.

“On World AIDS Day, we honor the millions of beautiful souls stolen by HIV/AIDS, salute the extraordinary resilience of those living with this vicious virus, and recommit to our fight to achieve an AIDS-free generation,” Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi said. “This year’s World AIDS Day observance at the Grove recognizes that through ‘Powerful Conversations’ and sharing our own

stories and experiences with HIV/AIDS, we take an important step toward healing and breaking down the stigma. Today – and every day – let us renew our pledge to ‘Let Communities Lead’ and finally send HIV/AIDS to the dustbin of history, once and for all.”

At 12:20 PM, Imani Rupert-Gordon, executive director of the National Center for Lesbian Rights in San Francisco, will moderate an insightful conversation on bodily autonomy, a fundamental human right that lies at the core of personal freedom, choice, and self-determination. The all BIPOC, female-identifying panel will engage around this essential concept: what defines it, how it affects various communities differently, the current legal, social, and political barriers that surround it, and what actions can be taken in its support. The panel includes Asmara Gebre, University of California, San Francisco School of Medicine faculty in the OBGYN department with clinical practice at San Francisco General Hospital; Aria Sa’id, transgender advocate and political strategist; founder/President Emerita of The Transgender District; and Lashanda (Tootie) Salinas, inaugural recipient of the National AIDS Memorial Hope and Inspiration Award which is bestowed upon an individual who has clearly exemplified through challenge and struggle what it means to be resilient and who serves as an inspiration for the HIV/AIDS community. Salinas is an active member of the Tennessee HIV Modernization Coalition, a Health Not Prisons advocate, and a member of The Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation Council of Justice Leaders. Salinas was first diagnosed with HIV/AIDS at 16. In 2006, she was unjustly imprisoned and charged with a crime for living with HIV, forcing her to register as a sex offender. She was instrumental in changing Tennessee state law to decriminalize living with HIV/AIDS.

“There is still so much stigma and misinformation around HIV/AIDS, including outdated laws that criminalize and take away basic human rights just for having the disease,” says Salinas. “Through education and advocacy, we can make great strides to change that.”

At 1 PM, longtime AIDS/HIV survivor, LGBTQ+ activist, Olympic gold medalist, NY Times best-selling author, and 2023 Light in the Grove Honoree Greg Louganis takes the stage to share his story of hope and resilience. Diagnosed with HIV/AIDS in 1988 at 28 years old, 6 months before his second Olympic Games, Louganis didn’t think he would live to reach 30. Now, 35 years later, Louganis reflects on living with HIV/AIDS and how this has shaped his trajectory and inspired his mission. During the conversation, Louganis will be bestowed the National Leadership Recognition Award, an annual award bestowed by the National AIDS Memorial. Past recipients include Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi, Dr. Anthony Fauci, Rick Welts, Phill Wilson, and others whose selfless service to the AIDS movement has delivered significant impact to those affected by the struggle and for those who courageously live on today.

“The most important thing is speaking up and speaking out. The more people get to know you, the more we lessen the stigma,” says Louganis. “Every person is so much more than the label we give each other. It is really key that we connect on a human level and be empathetic to the challenges that each of us have.”

Following the conversations, participants are invited to the Grove’s Circle of Friends, where nearly 4,000 names of lives touched by AIDS are engraved. A reading of the names engraved in the Circle

in 2023, including Louganis, will ensue. A light lunch will follow.

Gilead Sciences is the presenting sponsor of the World AIDS Day commemoration at the National AIDS Memorial Grove. “It is always a privilege to be part of this inspiring event as we help to honor the past, give voice to those tackling stigma today, and look to a healthier, more equitable future,” says Gilead Sciences Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Daniel O’Day. “We at Gilead Sciences are committed to helping to build that future by advancing science and working with partners like the National AIDS Memorial to support education and advocacy. As we celebrate the 35th anniversary of World AIDS Day, I believe we are closer than ever to ending the HIV epidemic for everyone, everywhere.”

About the National AIDS Memorial

The National AIDS Memorial was established in 1988. It is the only federally designated memorial to the AIDS epidemic. By sharing the story of the struggle against HIV/AIDS, we remember, in perpetuity, the lives lost, we offer healing and hope to survivors, and we inspire new generations of activists in the fight against stigma, denial, and hate in order to realize a just future. Learn more about the National AIDS Memorial at www.aidsmemorial.org.

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