

World AIDS Day reminds us much work remains to be done | Opinion

By **Ken Rapkin**

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For many months, media headlines have heralded that the end is near —for [AIDS](#). Scientists around the world have reported progress in their research for a cure and, indeed, there have been many successes.

Antiviral medications are making it significantly easier for those diagnosed with HIV/AIDS to live a full and long life, while pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is helping to stem the number of new infections. But it's still not a cure.

As we observe World AIDS Day, Dec. 1, it's important to remember that, despite such optimism, much work remains to be done.

Florida continues to be the epicenter of the AIDS epidemic, leading the nation in new HIV infections. Miami-Dade and Broward counties rank No. 1 and No. 2 respectively in the U.S. with new HIV infections, according to state and federal statistics. Worldwide approximately 36.7 million people are living with HIV and last year 2.1 million became newly infected. Another 1.1 million people died from AIDS-related illnesses, according to UNAIDS.

Over time, strains of HIV have been discovered that are proving to be resistant to existing drug regimens, while more rare strains of the virus for which we have no medications are being discovered. The virus is elusive, hiding in reservoirs throughout the body, often making it difficult to detect and eradicate.

It's not just the disease we must concern ourselves with, but also the many comorbidities that go along with living with AIDS. Among them are: hepatitis, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, [dementia](#) and cancer. And, as the population of those living with AIDS continues to age, the complexity of their needs will only continue to increase.

This is why funding for HIV/AIDS research must continue. Small organizations such as The Campbell Foundation are doing their part to fill the funding gaps by awarding grants to scientists exploring alternative, nontraditional avenues of research that will have direct clinical impact and relevancy to the HIV care and research community.

As national funding sources continue to shrink, the number of researchers coming to our foundation for financial assistance has continued to grow. Since our inception in 1995, we have awarded more than \$10 million in grants and another \$1 million for direct services.

The costs associated with conducting this research is very expensive, but each new advance moves us closer to one day eradicating the virus. To continue that work we must rely on the generosity of donors.

Without the small grants we have awarded, many researchers might not have been able to go on with their work. Indeed, a small grant from us often results in successes that allow these scientists to go on to get significantly larger funding from agencies such as the National Institutes of Health.

We have had many successes since our inception in 1995, and we look forward to continuing to do our part to put an end to HIV/AIDS in our lifetime.

Ken Rapkin is executive director of [The Campbell Foundation](http://TheCampbellFoundation.org), a Fort Lauderdale-based nonprofit organization dedicated to funding HIV/AIDS research. For more information, go to campbellfoundation.net