

# AGING TODAY

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## NEW YORK'S ROAH STUDY

- *As older people live longer with HIV, reexamine and modify the HIV Standards of Care to include routine assessments for the myriad comorbid illnesses that are common among aging adults.*
- *Amend the Older Americans Act explicitly to include services, outreach, training and research on issues of concern to older HIV-positive adults and to prohibit discrimination in services on the basis of sexual orientation and HIV status.*
- *Ensure that older people are included as an identifiable group at every stage of the HIV research process.*

These are some of the nearly two dozen policy and practice recommendations from the 2006 Research on Older Adults with HIV (ROAH), which reported on a sample of 914 people age 50 or older living with HIV in New York City. According to the report, 30% of the city's almost 100,000 HIV-positive people are currently ages 50-plus and 70% are 40 or older. The study projected, "Within the next decade it is probable that the majority of people with HIV in New York City will be over age 50. This is a pattern seen throughout the U.S."

A principal aim of ROAH, a project of the AIDS Community Research Initiative of America, was to provide valid data describing the physical and mental health, sexual behaviors, substance use, social networks, behavioral health and quality of life in this "largely unknown population."

The study sample, with an average age of 55.5, included 640 men, 264 women and 10 transgender people. Half of the respondents were African American, one-third were Latino and 14% were white. Of the participants, 83% were born in the United States. About half (47%) regularly attended religious services. Regarding sexual orientation, 67% of participants self-identified as heterosexual, 24% as homosexual and 9% as bisexual. Seventy percent of the ROAH respondents lived alone.

### INTERACTIONS WITH AGING

Noting that little research has been conducted on the interaction between HIV and comorbidities in aging, the research team examined such health challenges as adult-onset diabetes, Alzheimer's disease, cardiovascular disease and hypertension, menopause, osteoporosis and prostate cancer. "In addition," the authors observed, "HIV is now overwhelmingly a disease affecting poorer populations, particularly people of color and women."

Among the questions the study addressed about the older HIV population are: "Will the onset of comorbidities be earlier? Will the disease course be more severe? How will aging HIV-positive individuals tolerate the mix of antiviral medications and the powerful medications that target age-related illnesses?" Moreover, said the report, "The racial and ethnic groups most affected by HIV are the same people who continue to encounter endemic disparities in access to healthcare."

The study is available online at [www.acria.org/clinical/roah\\_07\\_25\\_06\\_final-3.pdf](http://www.acria.org/clinical/roah_07_25_06_final-3.pdf). ❖