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**March 1 is UNAIDS Zero Discrimination Day: Stigma and Discrimination  
Pose Major Barrier to Ending the AIDS Epidemic**

--GAIA and the Spahr Center working to confront HIV-related stigma globally and locally--

**SAN RAFAEL, Calif. (Feb. 20, 2018)** – Despite global progress toward HIV testing and treatment targets to end AIDS, stigma and discrimination may pose the greatest barrier to achieving this goal in our lifetime, according to a UNAIDS report. Stigma and discrimination create barriers to people accessing HIV services, putting lives at risk. If not addressed, stigma threatens the UNAIDS strategy to break the epidemic by the year 2020, leading to the end of AIDS a decade later. The Global AIDS Interfaith Alliance (GAIA), an NGO working in HIV hotspots in rural southern Africa, along with the Spahr Center, Marin County’s HIV services provider, are co-hosting “AIDS isn’t over... but it could be,” a film premiere and panel discussion on the topic on March 1, Zero Discrimination Day. The event will take place at Dominican University and via livestream on Facebook (details below).

According to the UNAIDS report released late last year, *Confronting discrimination: overcoming HIV-related stigma and discrimination in health-care settings and beyond*, people living with HIV who experience high levels of HIV-related stigma are more than twice as likely to delay treatment than people who do not perceive such stigma. According to the report, “people living with HIV avoid going to clinics for fear of having their status disclosed or of suffering further stigma and discrimination based on their HIV status.” Across 19 countries with available data, one in five people living with HIV avoided going to a clinic or hospital because they feared stigma or discrimination related to their HIV status, and one in four people living with HIV reported having experienced discrimination in health-care settings.

“The UNAIDS strategy to end the epidemic involves getting people tested and on antiretroviral (ART) treatment as early as possible,” said Todd Schafer, President and CEO of GAIA. “When people wait until they are very ill with HIV before seeking care, they are less likely to respond well to the treatment. For this reason, GAIA is identifying ways to ensure our programs deliver services in a way that encourages health-seeking behavior and does not stigmatize those who are HIV-positive.”

For example, GAIA’s mobile health clinics deliver healthcare services to remote and rural areas that lack access to care; they provide HIV services integrated with basic health services, meaning that clients are not singled out in these settings as HIV-positive. GAIA also provides HIV testing through a universal home-based testing and counseling strategy. The project has a testing acceptance rate of 99% and has been especially successful in reaching men and youth, hard-to-reach groups for HIV testing throughout sub-Saharan Africa. The high uptake of services indicates that universal testing provides a major opportunity for confidential testing and counseling in a comfortable environment. It may be that universal testing, in itself, reduces stigma associated with HIV by normalizing the testing process.

About GAIA

GAIA is a secular 501(c)(3) organization founded in 2000 in response to the global HIV/AIDS epidemic. Its mission is to develop and implement innovative and caring healthcare programs in resource-deprived regions in Africa, especially those most affected by HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and

malaria. To ensure the broadest possible impact, we rigorously test initiatives and promote the replication of successful models. GAIA programs aim to achieve UNAIDS 90-90-90 HIV treatment targets in rural, remote Malawi by 2020 -- 90% of people living with HIV know their status; 90% of those are on treatment; and 90% of those are virally suppressed, or noninfectious -- a “treatment as prevention” strategy to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030.

### About the Spahr Center

The Spahr Center is a non-profit community agency devoted to serving, supporting and empowering Marin’s LGBTQ community and everyone in the county living with and affected by HIV. The Spahr Center is keenly aware that stigma, perceived and real, is a major issue for people who are attempting to express themselves openly and live healthy and genuine lives. Stigma is a significant barrier to seeking and receiving needed health and behavioral health services; it insinuates itself into how we treat ourselves and others. It is essential that within our communities we engage in open and safe discussions about the subtleties of discrimination, the shame it produces. For the sake of individuals, families and our communities as a whole, we must work together to reduce the damage caused by decades of homophobia, AIDS phobia and criminalization, sex and gender discrimination and racism. At The Spahr Center, we are dedicated to working in partnership with all in our county who understand the importance of eradicating stigma its ramifications.

### Link to the UNAIDS Report

[http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media\\_asset/confronting-discrimination\\_en.pdf](http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/confronting-discrimination_en.pdf)

### **Event details**

Getting to zero: Confronting HIV-related stigma and discrimination, locally and globally  
Thursday, March 1, 2018  
7:00 PM-8:30 PM

Attend live on Facebook at:  
[www.facebook.com/thegaia](http://www.facebook.com/thegaia)

Or in-person at:  
Dominican University, Angelico Hall  
50 Acacia Ave. (off Grand Ave.), San Rafael  
(free parking in the Conlan Center lot at the intersection of Grand and Acacia Avenues)

For questions or to RSVP: [info@thegaia.org](mailto:info@thegaia.org)

### Participants

Welcome:

Amy Rankin-Williams, MA, DrPH (Adjunct Faculty, Dominican University)

Moderator:

Todd Schafer (President and CEO, GAIA)

Panelists:

Dr. Ellen Schell, RN, PhD (International Programs Director, GAIA, and Adjunct Faculty, UCSF)

Andy Fyne (Testing and Prevention Program Manager, The Spahr Center)

Melanie Nathan (Executive Director, African Human Rights Coalition)

Max Wade Flores (Poet and Community Activist)

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