**Increase in STDs and HIV Rates in Hampton Roads Prompts Call for STD and HIV Screenings**

**Norfolk, VA** – Over recent months, of the people who have sought testing services from us, LGBT Life Center has seen a drastic increase in STD rates, as well as in those diagnosed with HIV. Because of this trend in our testing programs, we are asking sexually active adults in Hampton Roads to seek STD & HIV testing at LGBT Life Center, by their primary care doctor or by a clinic near them. STD testing is part of an active and healthy life and should be done at least once a year and as much as four times a year for those that are highly sexually active. Regardless of when one was last tested, anyone who believes they are currently experiencing signs or symptoms of an STD or HIV is welcome to come in for a FREE screening.

This increase is consistent with national trends that have been ongoing since 2013 and saw a record high in 2017. It also corresponds with decreases in federal funding for HIV, STD, and sex education. “Locally, we’re doing everything we can to reverse this trend, including more community outreach events, mail order condom distribution, free STD and HIV testing, as well as opening a free-to-low-cost health care clinic in Norfolk that can test and treat STDs on-the-spot,” said Stacie Walls, CEO of LGBT Life Center.

Many STDs can be treated effectively and quickly, but without a proper diagnosis STDs can go untreated, increasing the chances of spreading to multiple partners as well as the difficulty in treating them. LGBT Life Center offers free, private STD and HIV testing with short waiting times – in most cases, less than 20 minutes and typically no more than one hour. Several tests offer results within 20 minutes and all other tests have results within 3-5 business days. LGBT Life Center also offers free-to-low-cost STD and HIV treatment at their clinic located at 1001 Monticello in Norfolk.

There are a number of ways to prevent STDs and HIV, including

·         Condoms – free at all LGBT Life Center locations, visit lgbtlifecenter.org/testing for hours and location information

·         PrEP - a daily pill that is a up to 99% effective at blocking HIV in HIV-negative individuals (and can be prescribed at LGBT Life Center’s clinic. Co-pay assistance is available and in some cases the entire cost is covered).

·         Treatment as Prevention – HIV-positive individuals on treatment can reduce the amount of virus in their system to a level that is undetectable so that there is effectively no risk of transmission.

·         PEP – a 28-day regimen for HIV-negative individuals that have come into contact with HIV

·         Dental dams – available for free at LGBT Life Center

·         Female condoms – free at all LGBT Life Center locations, visit lgbtlifecenter.org/testing for hours and location information

·         Sexual Health Education – LGBT Life Center staff members are ready to talk about how HIV and STDs are transmitted (and how they’re not)

·         Condom negotiation – LGBT Life Center staff members can help individuals learn techniques to ask their partner(s) to use condoms

·         Clean works – LGBT Life Center supplies kits and education on how to properly clean needles

Access to care, including STD and HIV testing, is an obstacle for many people, especially those in the LGBTQ+ communities. Discrimination, a lack of LGBTQ+ sensitivity and understanding, and a number of other factors have led to health disparities at an alarming rate within the community. LGBT Life Center is committed to providing access to STD and HIV testing in the Hampton Roads community. If you are unable to make it to one of our locations on the Peninsula or Southside, we have a mobile testing unit that can come to you. We may also be able to provide transportation services to those who are living with HIV and are in need of reliable medical transportation.

Please call us at 757-640-0929 for more information or visit our website at [www.lgbtlifecenter.org/testing](http://www.lgbtlifecenter.org/testing).

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**ABOUT LGBT LIFE CENTER**: LGBT Life Center was formerly known as CANDII House, Full Circle CANDII, and ACCESS AIDS Care/LGBT Center of Hampton Roads until June of 2017 when it expanded its mission and rebranded as LGBT Life Center. For 30 Years, LGBT Life Center has been a trusted leader that empowers the LGBTQ communities and all people affected by HIV through improving health and wellness, strengthening families and communities and providing transformative education and advocacy.