



HEALTHCARE TRAILBLAZER

Bill Hardy

President and CEO
Equitas Health

+ Behind the list of benefactors on the smoked-glass wall of a well-appointed patient waiting room, Equitas Health still has the heart of the grassroots social-services agencies that Ohio's LGBT activists started during the height of the AIDS epidemic.

President and CEO Bill Hardy runs an organization whose annual budget has grown in the last five years from \$6 million to \$60 million, whose staff has expanded from 70 to 235, and whose mission has evolved from helping HIV-positive people connect with medical treatment into providing care directly for the entire LGBT community.

Since April 2016, when Equitas Health changed its name from AIDS Resource Center Ohio—and dropped the disease from its name for the first time—the organization has been a primary care provider for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people who often avoid doctors because they feel stereotyped, judged or worse.

But Hardy says its roots in an era when HIV/AIDS and LGBT activism were closely linked will always influence his agency.

“We’re strongly human rights-focused as an organization,” Hardy says. “We believe that healthcare is a basic human right. We believe that part and parcel of that is all the ‘isms’

that we need to address: sexism, racism, homophobia.”

Hardy has shepherded the not-for-profit's growth since he started with Dayton's AIDS Foundation Miami Valley in 1993. Dayton and Toledo HIV/AIDS services groups merged to form AIDS Resource Center Ohio, which united in 2011 with the Columbus AIDS Task Force. Equitas Health now runs full-service medical centers in Columbus' Short North and Dayton's downtown, and it plans to open another center in April in Columbus' King-Lincoln District on the Near East Side.

The organization also offers HIV testing, support services, counseling, and social and support groups in Akron, Athens, Canton, Lima, Mansfield, Newark, Portsmouth and Toledo.

Hardy remembers the days when an

“We’re strongly human-rights focused as an organization. ... We believe that part and parcel of that is all the ‘isms’ that we need to address: sexism, racism, homophobia.”

HIV-positive diagnosis usually meant death within 18 months. People would show up at local agencies with all their possessions because their families kicked them out.

HIV isn't a death sentence anymore. Drugs help HIV-positive patients live normal lifespans, and federal policy emphasizes “treatment as prevention,” because medication can reduce levels of the virus in a person's body so much that it can't be passed on.

ARC Ohio and now Equitas Health have been highly successful in getting HIV-positive Ohioans on antiretroviral drugs. More than 90 percent of patients have been prescribed medications, compared to just 37 percent nationwide, and 87 percent are considered virally suppressed. Nationally, just 30 percent of HIV-positive people have achieved viral suppression.

That success led Hardy to see a different future for his organization than administering HIV tests, connecting people with doctors and social services, and passing out condoms.

“I don't tend to paint things in black and white, but I said to our board: ‘I think we have two options moving forward,’” Hardy recalls from a 2011 meeting right after ARC Ohio's merger with the Columbus AIDS Task Force. “I said, ‘Either think of an exit strategy to close our doors because we'll no longer

2017

Healthcare Achievement Awards

EXECUTIVE OF THE YEAR FINALISTS

Marcia Flaherty

CEO, Riverside
Radiology &
Interventional
Associates



Marcia Flaherty has achieved a rare trifecta in healthcare: satisfied patients, happy employees and a healthy bottom line.

In 17 years as CEO of Riverside Radiology & Interventional Associates, the biggest radiology practice in Ohio, she has weathered an era of huge change in the field and come out on top. Turnaround times for medical imaging reports exceed industry standards, satisfaction scores are high among patients and referring physicians, and *Modern Healthcare* magazine has named the practice a Best Place to Work.

Flaherty has spearheaded the creation of new entities to handle medical billing, IT support, human resources and other functions. She also is a member of the operations team for Strategic Radiology, a consortium of 26 large radiology practices from Connecticut to California that shares best practices and operational efficiencies.

Peggy Anderson

COO, Equitas Health



She started as a social-work intern for the Columbus AIDS Task Force, and Peggy Anderson has grown along with the organization.

The task force merged in 2011 with Dayton- and Toledo-based HIV/AIDS services agencies and became AIDS Resource Center Ohio. The nonprofit expanded its mission last year into primary care for LGBT patients. It's now Equitas Health.

Anderson has been chief operating officer since 2011, a time in which Equitas Health has grown from 70 staff to 235 and its budget from \$6 million to \$60 million. CEO Bill Hardy credits her as instrumental in the creation of Equitas Health's medical centers and pharmacies.

2017 Healthcare Achievement Awards

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT FINALISTS

Michael Para, MD

Medical Director
Equitas Health

Michael Para has been on the front lines of the fight against HIV/AIDS since he started his career in infectious diseases just as the virus was discovered in 1981.

Ohio State University's Wexner Medical Center is one of 30 sites nationwide that carries out federally funded research into the



treatment of HIV/AIDS, and Para is its co-principal

investigator. He's also a professor of internal medicine and associate dean for clinical research in OSU's College of Medicine.

Para serves as medical director for Equitas Health as well.

In addition to his work in research and treatment of the disease, Para advises the Ohio Department of Health's HIV Drug Assistance Program. He has been honored both for his medical and humanitarian work.

Mike Gire

Lawyer, Bricker & Eckler

The healthcare team that Mike Gire began 40 years ago at the Columbus-based Bricker & Eckler law firm now represents two-thirds of Ohio's hospitals and has clients in 35 states. Gire himself has been involved in more than 75 hospital mergers or creations of local health networks.

Gire was involved in

creation of the OhioHealth system, which was known as U.S. Health when it started at Riverside Methodist Hospital. He helped OhioHealth merge Columbus' Grant Medical Center into its system. And he was involved as OhioHealth expanded into Marion, Mansfield, Athens and Portsmouth.

"He is so much more than a lawyer when he acts in these settings," writes



OhioHealth President and CEO David Blom. "He really is a businessman with legal expertise."

degree in social work from Ohio State University in 1974. He went to work for Mount Carmel Health's patient financial services department until joining the hospital association in 1980.

While an entire field of expertise grew around him—he marvels that one can earn a degree today in medical billing and coding—Cataline described his own education as finance courses and “on-the-job training.”

And over the course of his career, he passed his knowledge on to countless hospital executives and finance officers, government officials and lawmakers, boosting the influence of the 220-member Ohio Hospital Association in the process. He was part of a national committee that established a uniform national billing data set for healthcare providers. He also served on a national policy advisory group for the federal CMS.

“Charles is a devoted and respected leader in the world of healthcare finance,” says Ryan Biles, the association's senior vice president of health economics and policy. “His contributions extend far beyond Ohio hospitals and into the communities they serve. He has earned the admiration of his peers and colleagues throughout the country during his career.”

Cataline, however, deflects such praise. On federal officials seeking his insight, he says: “They were great enough to come to us to ask, ‘What does this mean? How will you be affected?’” On the combined clout of the hospital association, he adds: “We have some enormously talented finance officers at Ohio hospitals.”

“I never knew everything; no one could ever know,” he says. “I didn't realize the influence I had on some of the folks I worked with until I decided to retire. But I took as much from them as I gave.”

Among Cataline's lasting contributions came when Ohio hospitals—overwhelmingly nonprofit operations—faced a challenge to their tax-exempt status a decade ago. He worked with OHA members and colleagues to develop an annual report detailing hospitals' charity care, educational efforts, wellness programs and other contributions that benefit their communities. The reports are now done annually and housed at the Ohio Department of Health for public inspection.

It's a “story behind the numbers” that opened the eyes even of hospital executives, he says. “And it really has educated policymakers on the depth of everything hospitals do in their communities.”

Just a few months after his retirement, Cataline already has gotten over the ability to sleep in and set his own schedule. He has now begun thinking about the next chapter. “I have a unique opportunity in a way,” he says, referring to his 36 years of insight into a field that only promises to get more complicated with a new administration overseeing—and promising to overhaul—federal healthcare policy.

“On the other hand,” he adds, “I was told that the best way to grow old gracefully after retirement is to not do what you did.”

“(Healthcare billing and finance) has developed into so complex a process I almost pity the person who's just coming into this field.”

2017 Healthcare Achievement Awards

PRACTITIONER OF THE YEAR FINALIST

Mimi Rivard

Nurse Practitioner
Equitas Health

Mimi Rivard is such an advocate for the use of an HIV-prevention regimen known as PrEP, she once took to Twitter to urge the producers of the Fox TV series, "Empire," to write it into the storyline of a gay character.

Closer to home, the nurse practitioner for Equitas Health has been much more



successful in her efforts to champion use of the once-daily pill that has proven

highly effective in preventing HIV transmission. More than 430 people in central Ohio have been prescribed PrEP through Equitas Health, which is the largest provider of PrEP services in the state.

Rivard has been involved in the fight against HIV/AIDS for more than 25 years. In addition to her work locally, she also has helped health officials develop care protocols in developing countries including Namibia, Swaziland and Liberia.

addressing any one piece."

Marger is a pretty indispensable part of the effort, too, colleagues say. He leverages his private practice to bring in additional help for Wellness on Wheels. He has added new services

such as early screening for gestational diabetes, and he has brought in a nurse practitioner who focuses on women's sexual and reproductive health.

"Bad weather, challenges and barriers—they do not impact him," says

Sonia Booker, the clinical manager for Wellness on Wheels who has worked with Marger for 12 years. "He is tireless in his efforts and truly a selfless person. There have been many instances where he has been up all night delivering babies and yet, that next morning, he will come to (Wellness on Wheels) ... to help care for our patients."

Wellness on Wheels sees about 60 to 75 patients weekly, and patients give birth to about 250 to 300 babies a year, Marger says. All patients are referred to doctors to continue their care. Nurses on the mobile unit call women afterward to make sure they're doing well.

Here's one of Marger's favorite follow-up reports: A former patient who gave birth about five years ago now works as a nurse for Wellness on Wheels. She was a hairdresser at the time but was inspired to enter the healthcare field.

"Seventeen years later, I see more positive than negative," Marger says of work to address infant mortality. "There's still a lot more to be done ... But if we don't try to do something different, you fail by definition. You've got to do something."

John Ridge

HIV Testing/Safe Point Volunteer
Equitas Health

+ John Ridge has found a new calling through his volunteer work with Equitas Health.

In his day job, the Grandview Heights resident works with “tons of numbers, tons of data” as director of a local call center. But for 20 or more hours every month—five each Saturday and another few during the week—he works with people who need a little kindness, some understanding, maybe just a smile at a moment that leaves many feeling quite vulnerable.

“It’s personalized,” he says of the gratification that comes from volunteering with Equitas Health’s HIV testing efforts and its one-year-old HIV- and Hepatitis C-prevention program that provides clean syringes to users of heroin, methamphetamine and other intravenous drugs. “It’s one-on-one.”

Since 2013, when he first sought testing at what was then known as AIDS Resource Center Ohio, Ridge has given back to the agency and the communities it serves.

“I think what keeps me coming back is the empathy and understanding I received when I first used Equitas’ services, so I want to live up to that standard,” he says.

Ridge first helped at Equitas Health’s Art for Life fundraiser, a glamorous, every-other-year art auction. He then sought more of a challenge. The agency offers free, 20-minute, walk-in HIV testing four days a week at its medical center in the Short North and a clinic in Clintonville. Volunteer manager Ashley McIntosh says dozens of volunteers do everything from greeting people at the door to delivering their test results.

“The idea of stepping on the other side of the table: I never had that much exposure to it before,” Ridge says.

In his five weekly hours with the Equitas Health needle-exchange program known as Safe Point, Ridge

began behind the scenes, gathering the new syringes, sharps containers, cotton balls and other supplies for clients as they spoke with other about their health and other matters. He’s now one of the people clients speak with on Saturday mornings at the Short North Medical Center.

Safe Point also operates on Tuesdays at the medical center and on Fridays at Southeast Inc. in Franklin.

In order for the program to work—its goal, beyond preventing infectious diseases among drug users, is to connect them with treatment if and when they’re ready—volunteer intervention specialists must build trust with the people they meet, McIntosh says.

“John makes participants feel safe and comfortable and thus more willing to seek treatment and take steps to reduce their risk of HIV, Hepatitis C, overdose and other medical emergencies,” she says.

Ridge’s mother was a 50-year smoker who tried to quit many times, he says. In his volunteer work, he says he seeks a balance between being nonjudgmental and being supportive when someone expresses a desire for treatment.

“You have to encourage them if they’re moving in that direction,” he says. “It’s a challenge. People don’t tell their spouses, their kids, their parents.”

Ridge greets people with a handshake and a smile, he says, and he looks them in the eye. He introduces himself and asks for their name, which they sometimes won’t give. But he understands why.

“To step into another person’s shoes and see a situation from their perspective is a challenge that’s there with each program participant. ... But that challenge to make a connection, establish that we’re working together on this situation, and get them the help they need is my way of honoring the Equitas people that helped me.”



2017 Healthcare Achievement Awards

PATHWAY TO POPULATION HEALTH FINALISTS

Equitas Health

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention surveyed the health of gay, lesbian and bisexual Americans for the first time in 2013. It found higher incidence of conditions such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease, greater numbers of smokers and heavy drinkers, and a smaller percentage of people who had seen

a doctor in the past year or even had a doctor to go to.

Founded as separate HIV/AIDS services agencies in Columbus, Dayton and Toledo during the 1980s, Equitas Health in 2016 completed its evolution into a full-fledged health network aimed at delivering culturally competent care to LGBT Ohioans, including those with HIV/AIDS.

Among its successes: 91

percent of HIV-positive Equitas Health patients are receiving antiretroviral drugs, and 87 percent have viral loads that are so low they're considered undetectable. Viral suppression, as it's called, greatly reduces a person's risk of passing on the virus. The national averages for those categories are 37 percent and 30 percent, respectively.

Make Safe Happen

Nationwide Insurance

Preventable accidents are the leading cause of death among American children, and half of those accidents—suffocations, drownings, fires, poisonings—occur in the home. But when Nationwide surveyed American parents in 2015, it found that 94 percent believe the home is the safest place a child can be.

With partners that include Nationwide Children's Hospital of Columbus,

the American Academy of Pediatrics, the International Association of Fire Fighters and the Ad Council, the Columbus-based insurance company launched Make Safe Happen in 2015. It's an educational effort that includes a mobile app, website and other guides full of safety tips and valuable information for families.

The app has been downloaded more than 25,000 times, and its users report completing suggested safety tasks more than 140,000 times.



man, has done much of what it set out to do:

- 71 homes were renovated, then sold or rented, through the end of 2016 in an area stretching from Livingston Avenue south to Kossuth Street and from Parsons Avenue east to 22nd Street.
- 15 new homes were built and sold on previously vacant lots.
- 149 homeowners were given an average of about \$13,000 in grants to make improvements that included new roofs, windows or siding.

Mayor Andrew Ginther has called the program “impressive” and “a representation of the positive transformation possible through the commitment and actions of many partners in the community.”

In all, the investment just in housing

in the neighborhood known as Southern Orchards totals more than \$18 million, according to Angela Mingo, Nationwide Children's Hospital's community relations coordinator. But the program offers more than housing.

The hospital and partners that include the United Way of Central Ohio and the South Side group Community Development for All People supported the addition of four new Community Crime Patrol members in the neighborhood to address safety issues. Neighborhood residents also have created a block watch program.

Children's Hospital nurse practitioners and behavioral health specialists are helping nurses at 13 Columbus City Schools buildings on the South Side, and mobile care units take primary care to children. A commu-

nity garden—ambitiously called an “urban forest” because it will include fruit trees—will sprout this spring on Carpenter Avenue to help families grow their own fresh produce.

Visits to the homes of preschool children, in which they're given books, lessons and school supplies, have boosted kindergarten readiness scores by 50 percent.

More than 50 Children's employees also serve as mentors for neighborhood kids.

And finally, a 58-unit apartment complex whose first residents will move in come spring will offer on-site career-development help designed to prepare people for jobs at Nationwide Children's Hospital. Job-training efforts already resulted in 175 neighborhood residents being hired at the hospital in 2015.

“There was a conscious decision by hospital leadership,” Mingo says of the inception of Healthy Neighborhoods, Healthy Families. “We wanted to be a source of excellence in pediatric care but also a catalyst for revitalization on the South Side. ... We felt like we needed to play a role in the neighborhood.”

While more than 450 residents of the neighborhood covered by the program are Children's employees, Mingo said the effort has not been a ploy to gentrify the area around the hospital. She calls the area a mixed-income neighborhood, and the new and rehabilitated homes also have provided opportunities for renters to become homeowners.

For LaQuita Long, a one-story ranch home on Carpenter Street offered the chance for so much more. It's not only the first house the mother of two has owned, it was custom built to accommodate her 11-year-old daughter, Zeza, who lives with cerebral palsy. The home has hallways that are wide enough for Zeza's wheelchair, light switches that are low enough for her to reach, and a ramp that accommodates her coming and going. It's also a quick walk to the hospital where Zeza still receives care.

“We really are blessed,” Long says. “We're just all comfortable.”

One of the Healthcare Achievement Awards judges judges comments that this project is an “outstanding example of a comprehensive population health approach!”