



## Medical Advocacy & Outreach

MAO Montgomery, 2900 McGehee Road, Montgomery, AL 36111  
MAO Dothan, 1865 Honeysuckle Road, Suite 2, Dothan, AL 36305  
MAO Atmore, 1321 South Main Street, Suite 2, Atmore, AL 36502  
MAO Selma, 1015 Medical Center Pkwy, Suite 308, Selma, AL 36701

### PRESS RELEASE

#### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MEDIA CONTACT: Thomas Stephens, Media Relations, Cell: (334) 479-1996, Email: [tstephens@maoi.org](mailto:tstephens@maoi.org)

### **2021 VIRTUAL BREAKING BARRIERS SYMPOSIUM: HIV & COVID-19 IN ALABAMA**

MONTGOMERY - Are you a licensed nurse, counselor, social worker, physician or other care professional? Are you a committed health advocate? Medical Advocacy and Outreach (MAO) and the Alabama AIDS Education Training Center (Alabama AETC) will be hosting the 2021 Breaking Barriers Symposium virtually on May 26 and 27, 2021. To increase convenience for those who may not be able to participate both days, each day requires a separate registration. Registration details can be found at [MAOI.ORG/EVENTS](https://MAOI.ORG/EVENTS) or [SEAETC.COM/CALENDAR](https://SEAETC.COM/CALENDAR). Care professionals may fondly remember the in person conference-style version of Breaking Barriers before the COVID-19 pandemic. Out of consideration to ongoing public health precautions, the event has been converted to a two-day FREE virtual continuing education experience for physicians, nurses, social workers, counselors, other care-related professionals, and non-licensed health advocates.

The overarching theme of the 2021 Virtual Breaking Barriers Symposium examines two concerns of epidemic proportion, HIV and COVID-19. While continuing efforts to prevent, diagnose and treat HIV, which by weakening the body's immune system leaves those living with the virus susceptible to a lengthy list of chronic and potentially deadly health conditions, we must also examine the impact of COVID-19, its impact on chronic conditions in general, and the potentially understudied co-existence of HIV and COVID-19. Given the largely rural nature of Alabama and the longstanding shortage of care providers in many communities, much of the subject matter will be viewed through the lens of "the Cotton State". However, the content supports efforts to advance care and effectiveness throughout much of the Deep South and the nation.

Each day of the 2021 Breaking Barriers Symposium will explore the direct and peripheral issues inherent in delivering a successful holistic response while offering up to 4.25 contact hours per day required by many front line workers for licensure. Advance online registration is required. Access to a computer or smartphone capable of viewing and listening to a live streamed program and stable Internet connection will be needed to participate. Those requiring assistance during the registration process may call (334) 356-1524 or email [jvanmegen@maoi.org](mailto:jvanmegen@maoi.org).

#### **Breaking Barriers Symposium: DAY ONE**

##### *HIV in Alabama*

**May 26, 2021, 9 AM – 3 PM (CST)**

**Continuing Education:** 4.25 contact hours possible. Partial credit will not be offered.

**Scheduled Topics and [Presenters:](#)**

- *Ending the HIV Epidemic in Alabama*, Laurie Dill MD, AAHIVS, Keynote Speaker
- *Innovations in Care*, Michael Murphree, LICSW
- *Using Big Data to Inform HIV Testing Interventions*, Lynn Matthews, MD, MPH
- *Trauma-Informed Care in the South* (Panel Discussion), Shakita Brooks-Jones, MSW, MPA (Panel Moderator), Panel Members - Tommy Chavis, LPC, Tony Walker, Tori Cooper, Marguerite Barber-Owens MD, AAHIVS

## Breaking Barriers Symposium: DAY TWO

### COVID in Alabama

May 27, 2021, 9 AM – 3 PM (CST)

**Continuing Education:** 4.25 contact hours possible. Partial credit will not be offered.

### Scheduled Topics and [Presenters:](#)

- *COVID-19 in Vulnerable Populations*, Michael Saag, MD, Keynote Speaker
- *COVID-19 Vaccine Updates*, Cordelia Stearns, MD, AAHIVS
- *Impact of COVID-19 on HIV Linkage and Prevention*, Latesha Elope, MD, MSPH & Anthony Merriweather, MSPH
- *The Impact of COVID-19 on Behavioral Health*, Elana M. Parker Merriweather, Ed.S., AADC, BCC, BC-TBH

Closing remarks will be provided at the end of each day by Bretia Gordon, Ed.D, MPA, Education and Training Officer for MAO who also serves as the Program Manager for Alabama AETC. *“Each of our presenters brings a unique perspective that will enhance the knowledge-base and tool box of every participant. To be truly effective in our efforts to end the ‘twin pandemics’, HIV and COVID-19, it will take the combined efforts of physicians, nurses, counselors, social workers, those operating in supportive roles to those on the front lines, and those helping to create and refine policies to come together and collectively share updated information and strategies that aid the fight. The 2021 Breaking Barriers Symposium is more than just another conference, it is an opportunity to look past our individual roles, begin to formulate new strategies, and walk away with a renewed sense of confidence that we CAN and WILL do more,”* stated Dr. Bretia Gordon.

Included in the list of credentialed presenters, MAO and Alabama AETC are thrilled to have Dr. Laurie Dill, MD, AAHIVS and Dr. Michael Saag, MD providing keynote presentations for the Breaking Barriers Symposium. To many, neither requires much introduction. Dr. Dill is a multi-award-winning, nationally-recognized HIV specialist, speaker and prevention strategist. Dr. Dill handed off the Medical Officer mantel at MAO in January 2020, to assume an equally critical role leading wide-reaching efforts to End the HIV Epidemic in Alabama while continuing to provide care to her patients. She continues to prove why she was listed in POZ Magazine's 2016 Top 100 Providers. Dr. Saag is an internationally acclaimed researcher, speaker, innovator, and author of [Positive: One Doctor’s Personal Encounters with Death, Life, and the US Healthcare System](#). Among his full time roles, Dr. Saag holds the Jim Straley Chair in AIDS Research, serves as the Director of the Division of Infectious Disease and of the William C. Gorgas Center for Geographic Medicine, Director of the Center for AIDS Research, and the Associate Dean of Global Health for the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Having spent much of his professional life diving into roles that would elevate professional understanding about infectious diseases, Dr. Saag, like so many, was surprised to learn he was infected with COVID-19 in

2020. Following his diagnosis with COVID-19 in the spring of 2020, he shared the following in an April 11, 2020 interview with NPR, *“Everything broke loose. I ended up with fever, chills, and headache. By the time the morning arrived, I was better and I could function and think clearly. But then cruelly and relentlessly, the symptoms came back every single day in the late afternoon, and it just repeated itself. It felt a lot like Groundhog Day. I didn't know if each night I would deteriorate and have to go in the hospital, or whether I would survive the night.”* Fortunately, Dr. Saag came through the lengthy ordeal leaving him with even more personal and professional insights on what we may see, what we might expect, and what we can do.

Visit [MAOI.ORG/EVENTS](https://MAOI.ORG/EVENTS) or [SEAETC.COM/CALENDAR](https://SEAETC.COM/CALENDAR). Click the date or dates you would like to participate in the 2021 Breaking Barriers Symposium to register. To receive continuing education credit, participants must actively view and participate each day. At the close of each day, the learning system will send Certificates of Completion to those who met the established participation requirements. Training materials will be downloadable from the learning platform.

### **About Medical Advocacy and Outreach (MAO)**

Established in 1987, Medical Advocacy and Outreach (MAO) supports the overall health and wellbeing of individuals needing our services, including those living with HIV and substance use disorders, by delivering comprehensive healthcare through medical treatment, behavioral health services, social services, and health and civic education. It is the vision of MAO that every individual it serves will live a full and healthy life filled with dignity and respect. Through medical and behavioral care services alone, MAO serves more than 2,000 South Alabama residents spanning 28 plus counties and 18,675 square miles. More than 4,500 additional persons benefit from specialized, developmentally and culturally appropriate health education, and free HIV and STI testing each year in schools and community settings. Additionally, more than 1,200 career care professionals benefit from for-credit continuing education programs offered by MAO and its affiliated Alabama AETC in a given year. Direct care services are extended from four full-service clinic sites in Montgomery, Dothan, Atmore and Selma, as well as eleven additional satellite clinics in some of Alabama’s most rural communities, all connected through state-of-the-art telemedicine technology. When you see a circle with a hand reaching for a heart, you have found MAO. Compassion, care, understanding and innovative specialty care for 34 years. MAO is a 501(c) 3 not-for-profit health care and health education organization.

### **About the Alabama AIDS Education Training Center (Alabama AETC)**

The Alabama AIDS Education Training Center (Alabama AETC) is a joint initiative between Medical Advocacy and Outreach (MAO) and the Southeast AIDS Education and Training Center (SE AETC) at Vanderbilt University’s Comprehensive Care Clinic, supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Photo Credit ([L.Dill.Day1.KeyNote.1](#)): Dr. Laurie Dill, MD, AAHIVS will provide the keynote address on May 26, 2021 titled *Ending the HIV Epidemic in Alabama*. Photo courtesy of MAO archives.

Photo Credit ([M.Saag.Day2.Keynote.1](#)): Dr. Michael Saag, MD will provide the keynote address on May 27, 2021 titled *COVID-19 in Vulnerable Populations*. Photo courtesy of the University of Alabama, Birmingham.

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