

Zero HIV Stigma Day

From Vision to Reality: A Call to End HIV Stigma

In recognition of Zero HIV Stigma Day, July 21st, the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS joins the movement to eradicate harmful attitudes, behaviors, judgments, and policies towards people living with or vulnerable to acquiring HIV. In solidarity with all communities who continue to experience negative consequences of irrational beliefs, myths, and biases, we call for an End to HIV Stigma.

What is HIV stigma? HIV stigma is negative attitudes and beliefs about people living with HIV (PLWH). It is the prejudice that comes with labeling an individual as part of a group that is believed to be socially unacceptable. The HIV stigma that a person experiences can be worsened by their individual characteristics, such as their race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, substance use history, and other factors.

How is HIV stigma harmful? HIV affects everyone. Stigma can worsen a person's health conditions and delay or even stop them from getting tested and treated. Stigma can lead to social isolation, depression/anxiety, and impact professional growth and development, trapping a person in a worsening cycle of illness. HIV stigma and misinformation also unfairly shapes systems and policies. For example, the majority of states have an HIV-specific criminal law or use their general criminal laws to unfairly prosecute people living with HIV.

What can we do to end HIV stigma?

Individuals – Educate yourself about HIV. Check your biases and be conscious of the language you use when discussing PLWH. PLWH on treatment with an undetectable viral load cannot sexually transmit HIV (Undetectable = Untransmittable), which frees them and their sexual partners from the fear of transmitting HIV to their sexual partner(s). This fact has changed what it means for PLWH to live and love with HIV. Talk openly about HIV and sexual health with your sexual partner(s), community, and your health care provider

Communities – Community leaders should learn about HIV and voice their support for HIV testing and treatment, as well as the human right of treating PLWH with dignity and respect. Community settings should post educational material and host events where communities can learn the facts about HIV from PLWH themselves as well as other experts.

Healthcare Settings – Healthcare settings and health professional training programs should provide ongoing HIV-related training and education to the entire staff and future healthcare workforce. In addition, healthcare settings should develop and enforce institutional policies and procedures to protect persons living with HIV from discrimination in their facilities.

Governments – Government organizations should ensure through programming, grants, policies, legislation, and leadership, that ending the HIV epidemic is prioritized and addressed in a non-stigmatizing manner.

Private Sector – Private organizations should use their ability to engage with employees, customers, and communities to support people living with HIV and efforts to end the HIV epidemic.

People Living with HIV – Your very existence is enough. Your ability to thrive in your community is important. Partner with your healthcare provider, family, and friends to benefit from medical innovations and support that ensure you are able to live a long, healthy life.

All of us – We can do our part to end HIV stigma through our individual actions, such as using non-stigmatizing language and knowing the facts about HIV, as well as taking part in collective efforts to ensure policies and systems that allow PLWH to be able to live long and healthy lives. HIV stigma will persist if we fail to recognize the humanity of people living with HIV. To learn more about ending HIV stigma and Zero HIV Stigma Day, visit <https://www.hiv.gov/events/awareness-days/zero-hiv-stigma-day/>.