

6 HIV Stigma and Discrimination

HIV stigma

HIV stigma is negative attitudes and beliefs about people living with HIV.

Examples of stigma:

- Believing that only certain groups of people can get HIV.
- Feeling that people deserve to get HIV because of their choices.

HIV discrimination

HIV discrimination is the act of treating people living with HIV differently than those without HIV. Discrimination is the behaviour caused by stigma (negative beliefs).

Examples of discrimination:

- A healthcare professional putting on two pairs of gloves when providing care to someone living with HIV.
- Refusing casual contact with someone living with HIV.
- Socially isolating a member of a community because they are living with HIV.

HIV stigma and discrimination are based on **moral judgements, ignorance and fear**. It stems from outdated ideas about HIV, misinformation about how the virus is transmitted, and a lack of knowledge about effective HIV treatment available today.

Stigma around having HIV and how you get HIV can:

- Make those diagnosed with HIV, **feel afraid** to tell others.
- Stop people living with HIV accessing the **treatment and support** they need.
- Make people **less likely to get tested** for HIV. Undiagnosed and untreated HIV is the main way the virus is spread.



Ways to reduce HIV stigma and discrimination:

- **Learn** about how HIV can and cannot be transmitted and **share** these facts with others.
- Share the message that “**Undetectable equals Untransmittable**” (U=U), meaning people living with HIV who are on effective HIV treatment and achieve an undetectable viral load, cannot sexually transmit HIV.
- **Challenge HIV stigma and discrimination.** Make a formal complaint or if it comes up in conversation, tell people the facts.
- **Understand the rights** of people living with HIV and challenge out of date policies and attitudes.
- **Support** people who share they have HIV. **Listen** and take time to **understand** what it means.