

# RESPONDING TO HIV-RELATED STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION



In order to respond effectively to HIV-related stigma and discrimination, we need to implement a range of strategies that tackle prejudice and protect people's rights.

## EDUCATION

Education is a key component of any co-ordinated effort to reduce the extent of HIV stigma and discrimination. Education is particularly important because it has the potential to affect change where the law doesn't, such as in families, among friends and in casual contact. It also helps realise the goal of *preventing* discrimination rather than *responding* to it after it has occurred.

Three broad types of education are important:

Public education is required to maintain or increase knowledge among the general population. It should be focused on the modes of HIV transmission; the risks associated with certain behaviour, including the fact that HIV poses no risk in day-to-day contact; the rights of people living with HIV and the rights of the communities most affected by HIV.

**Professional education** can play an important role by informing the attitudes and practices of professionals and by enhancing their potential to have a positive influence over the attitudes and practices of others. In a recent survey, people living with HIV in the UK indicated that they were most likely to experience HIV-related discrimination in health care settings. This demonstrates the need to ensure that health care professionals, along with other professionals in other sectors are informed about non-stigmatising and non-discriminatory approaches to dealing with people with HIV or populations affected by the virus.

Focused education or educational programs for specific communities, settings or contexts, is also needed. A good example of focused education is to reduce HIV discrimination in the workplace. To create a safe and non-discriminatory workplace, it is necessary to have an educational programme, which informs staff about the equal opportunity and anti-discriminatory policies, and the principles behind policies, how to deal with issues that often arise around HIV, dispel myths and fallacies about HIV and populations affected by it, and provide clear direction on how to combat discrimination towards people with HIV.

Other examples of where focused educational programs could be implemented include local communities (urban or rural) where people with HIV live, with children, staff, and parents associated with child-care centres, and in formal educational settings such as schools, colleges and universities.

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## COMMUNITY MOBILISATION

A second key element in an effective response to HIV-related stigma and discrimination is the empowerment of the communities most affected by the virus.

Community mobilisation is about creating networks and organisations that involve and represent people affected by HIV. These networks and organisations have historically played a vital role in working for the social and political changes necessary to prevent, challenge and eliminate HIV discrimination.

They include community-based organisations, self-help groups, and campaigning and lobbying initiatives.

An effective community mobilisation response also requires the involvement of other existing community groups, such as religious groups. Religious groups or other community groups can influence how communities respond to HIV-related stigma and discrimination.

## ANTI-DISCRIMINATION LEGISLATION AND LEGAL REFORM

Legal protection for people living with HIV and AIDS and vulnerable populations is also a key element to an effective and powerful response to HIV-related stigma and discrimination. Legislation can be an effective educational tool, but in order to eradicate discrimination, anti-discrimination law needs to *create rights* (to healthcare, to services, to privacy). Restrictions to these rights, that are justifiable, need to be clear, enforceable and known.

To do so, anti-discrimination law needs to adopt a model which:

- Penalises certain forms of conduct;
- Focuses on the *protective* function of the law and the need to uphold the rights and interests of disadvantaged groups; and

In order to be effective, anti-discrimination law must address both individual discrimination and systemic discrimination. The key point is that discriminatory actions do not result from isolated, aberrant views or behaviour, but are generated from a complex web of systemic practices which are substantially hidden and often unconscious. Individual acts of discrimination are a subset of this much broader and elusive systemic backdrop. If individual discrimination is to be remedied then systemic discrimination must be simultaneously addressed.

Consequently, anti-discrimination law must be used proactively to eradicate discrimination by promoting and supporting *an enabling environment*. An essential part of this enabling environment involves the empowerment of disadvantaged groups by improving their legal status.

## ARE YOU HIV PREJUDICED?

For more information visit the campaign website at [www.aryouhivprejudiced.org](http://www.aryouhivprejudiced.org)

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