

~~STIGMA~~ FREE

For the Mental Health and
Wellness of People
Living with and Affected
by HIV



ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN

HIV & mental health stigma and discrimination undermine the physical and especially the mental health of people living with and vulnerable to HIV. Responding to this situation requires significantly more collaboration from workers across the continuum of HIV and mental healthcare services. **This campaign calls on all workers to emphasise wellness, stigma-free and integrated services, and continuing education.**

EATG's Stigma-Free HIV & Mental Health campaign focuses on how stigma and discrimination have a serious negative impact on the mental health of people living with and vulnerable to HIV. Sadly, this is also too often the case even in healthcare settings. The campaign also emphasises that improving **integration** across HIV and mental health services is central to addressing this situation.

HIV & mental health stigma and discrimination undermine the physical and especially the mental health of people living with and vulnerable to HIV. This is even more the case for those living with multiple or **intersecting marginalisations**, e.g. people who are living with HIV and also with tuberculosis or viral hepatitis, or are gay men, trans, gender non-conforming, belonging to ethnic minorities, indigenous people, drug users, migrants, prisoners, sex workers, or several of the above. Addressing this situation will require **much improved collaboration across professional and lay, clinical and psychosocial, hospital and clinic-led as well as community-based/led workers and services.**

The rationale for this campaign and its recommendations is based on many sources, including *The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, as well as *Integration of mental health and HIV interventions - Key considerations*, produced jointly by UNAIDS and WHO. EATG's recent *Briefing Paper: Mental Health of People living with HIV*, and *Discussion Paper: The role of community-based services within the continuum of HIV and mental health* are also fundamental for this campaign and its recommendations. Furthermore, this campaign is informed by the findings of the *ECDC Stigma: survey of people living with HIV* and the *mental health in all policies approach*.

UNAIDS factsheet on *HIV and Stigma and Discrimination*¹ notes:

- Across 19 countries with available data, up to 40% of people living with HIV report being forced to submit to a medical or health procedure.
- In 25 of 36 countries with recent data, more than half (>50%) of people aged 15 to 49 hold discriminatory attitudes toward people living with HIV.
- People living with HIV who perceive high levels of HIV-related stigma are 2,4 times more likely to delay enrolment in care until they are very ill.
- Removing laws criminalising sex work has been estimated to avoid between 33% and 46% of new HIV infections among sex workers and clients over a ten-year period.
- Under international human rights law, discrimination on the basis of HIV status, sexual orientation, sex and gender identity and expression, health status (including drug dependence) or sex work is a human rights violation.



HIV & Mental Health

The HIV & Mental Health project has been developed by the EATG, and was made possible through a grant from Gilead Sciences Europe Ltd, Merck Sharp and Dohme, and ViiV Healthcare Europe Ltd. EATG acknowledges that the sponsors had no control or input into the structure or the content of the initiative.

DEFINITIONS

Mental health

The World Health Organisation describes mental health as *‘a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community.’*² It is about enjoying life and coping with its stresses and difficulties.

Intersectional stigma and discrimination

In its *Intersectionality Resource Guide and Toolkit*, UN Women describes intersectionality as recognising that *‘people’s lives are shaped by their identities, relationships and social factors. These combine to create intersecting forms of privilege and oppression depending on a person’s context and existing power structures such as patriarchy, ableism, colonialism, imperialism, homophobia and racism.’*³ People who experience such multiple layers of stigma and discrimination are at increased risk of HIV.

The continuum of HIV & mental health care

The continuum of HIV and mental health care involves an integrated, comprehensive range of services spanning all levels care: hospital, specialist, primary care, and community care. This continuum requires good working relationships and two-way referral systems. EATG conducted two webinars in early 2023 on a comprehensive approach to the continuum of HIV and mental health care, with a focus on acknowledging the role of community-based care in that continuum. Subsequently, it produced a discussion paper on this continuum: *Community-based HIV and Mental Health Care.*⁴

Psychosocial services

Psychosocial services address our psychological as well as our social needs in order to improve our quality of life or wellbeing; they recognise that an individual’s well-being may be undermined by a medical condition.⁵ They are provided not only to a person facing physical or mental health challenges, but may also be provided to their loved ones and caregivers. These services include psychotherapy and counselling, individual and group peer and buddy support, awareness raising and training on relevant topics, care-giver support and self-care, home care.

1 <https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/documents/2021/07-hiv-human-rights-factsheet-stigma-discrimination>

2 <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>

3 <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/01/intersectionality-resource-guide-and-toolkit>

4 <https://www.eatg.org/publications/discussion-paper-community-based-hiv-mental-health-care-the-role-of-community-based-services-within-the-continuum-of-hiv-and-mental-health-care/>

5 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7460093/>



JOIN THE
CAMPAIGN

The Stigma-Free HIV & Mental Health Campaign **calls on HIV and mental health professionals, trained lay workers and people living with HIV to:**

Promote that **HEALTH IS ABOUT WELLNESS**

Health is about wellness or quality of life, about both physical and mental health, not just freedom from disease but about enjoying life. **There is no health without mental health.**

Mental wellness involves a lifelong process to build and strengthen our psychosocial resources. It includes prevention, managing, coping, and being resilient in the face of life's stresses.

Commit to **STIGMA-FREE HIV & MENTAL HEALTH CARE**

Each person living with HIV and mental health challenges may experience stigma and discrimination from healthcare professionals, lay workers and volunteers. This may relate not only to their specific health concern but also to other intersecting aspects of who they are, e.g. their race or ethnicity, sex, gender, religion, or socioeconomic background.

The *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* ensures **full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, including people who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments** (Article 1).

Ensure **CONTINUING HIV & MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION** for all professional and lay workers in this field

All professional and lay workers who provide HIV and mental healthcare provision need to understand the interaction between physical and mental health. They also need appropriate skills, e.g., on stigma-free service provision, screening for common mental health conditions, psychosocial support, harm reduction, gender-related issues, and self-care/help/management.

Continuing education also needs to address the need for updated guidelines for mental health practitioners on HIV, as well as for updated guidelines on HIV for mental health practitioners.

Collaborate to ensure people living with HIV receive **INTEGRATED HIV & MENTAL HEALTH CARE**

HIV and mental health services are provided in hospitals, specialist clinics, primary care, and community-led services. Each level of health care has its part to play. Throughout their life course, people living with HIV need these services to work together, with strong two-way referral pathways.

Achieving the aims of the Global AIDS Strategy 2021-2026: *End Inequalities. End AIDS* requires the **integration of HIV** into all systems for health, social protection, and humanitarian and pandemic responses.

The Strategy calls for 90% of people living with HIV and people at risk, to be linked to people-centred and context-specific integrated services by 2025.