



## The Medical Monitoring Project (MMP)

# Reducing HIV Stigma and Discrimination in Washington State

### What is HIV stigma?

HIV stigma is negative attitudes and beliefs about people living with HIV. There are still misconceptions about HIV transmission, the communities most affected by HIV, and what it means to live with HIV. These negative attitudes are frequently expressed as fear, judgement, and rejection. Some examples of HIV stigma are:

- Believing that only certain groups of people can get HIV
- Rationalizing that certain people deserve to get HIV
- Judging people who take steps to prevent HIV transmission

One way that HIV stigma is particularly harmful is that it can be internalized; people may take in stereotypes about HIV and report the same feelings about themselves.

### What is HIV discrimination?

Discrimination occurs when stigma turns into behavior. HIV discrimination is the act of treating people living with HIV differently. Some examples are:

- Refusing casual contact
- Using derogatory language
- Refusing to provide medical care based on HIV status
- Socially isolating someone

### Does stigma matter?

Yes! Stigma causes shame and fear. When people are afraid of experiencing discrimination, they are less likely to be tested or treated for HIV. For people living with HIV, discrimination can mean medical care, housing, or social support are out of reach.

HIV stigma and discrimination are widespread in Washington State. 92% of people living with HIV in Washington State reported negative feelings about living with HIV and 28% have reported discrimination in a healthcare setting.

### People Living with HIV in Washington Report These Feelings of Internalized Stigma:



### How Can I Help Stop HIV Stigma?

#### Use Empowering Language:

- Refer to HIV rather than AIDS.
- Use person-first terms to show that people are more than a diagnosis! "People living with HIV" rather than "HIV-infected people."

#### Model Positive Behavior:

- HIV cannot be transmitted through casual contact or food. Demonstrate this to others by treating people living with HIV just as you would any one else!

#### Talk about HIV:

- Stigma and discrimination feed on fear and secrecy. If you feel safe, talk about your own experiences with HIV testing, prevention, and treatment.

## What is the Department of Health Doing?

### - Undetectable = Untransmittable Campaign

In 2018 DOH was the sixth state health department to sign onto this HIV prevention campaign, which is also known as U=U. This slogan describes the scientific findings that people living with HIV with undetectable levels of HIV in their blood (the goal of routine HIV treatment) cannot sexually transmit HIV to their partners.

### - Legislation

DOH is working to modernize Washington's HIV laws to reflect current science and reduce HIV-related stigma.

### - Media Campaign

DOH is implementing a media campaign to raise awareness among people living with HIV about the benefits of getting and staying in treatment and to help reduce HIV stigma.

### - Peer Navigation

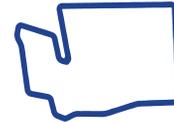
DOH is funding Peer Navigation positions within community-based organizations. Peer navigators are PLWH who are engaged in care, share similar experiences with, and live within the same communities as the people they mentor. Peer navigators encourage retention in care and support services as well as provide visible leadership for those living with HIV.

### - Pharmacy Survey

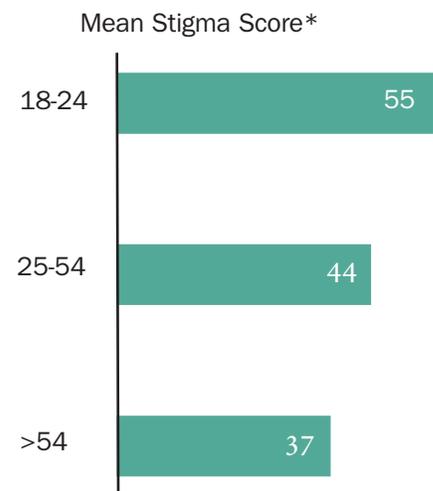
MMP data and anecdotal information provided by clients indicated that HIV stigma is prevalent within pharmacies. DOH conducted a customer satisfaction survey of AIDS Drug Assistance Program participants to better understand where discrimination may be occurring.

## Who experiences HIV stigma?

Everyone. People living with HIV are affected by HIV across gender, race, and region.

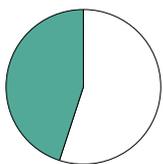


Younger people report the highest level of internalized stigma:

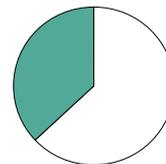


\*Mean stigma score is derived from participant responses to questions about experience with stigma and is scaled from 0 to 100

## What Other Types of Discrimination Do People Living with HIV Face?



45% of people who experienced discrimination in a healthcare setting reported that it occurred because of their sexual orientation and practices



37% of people who inject drugs said that they experienced discrimination because of their drug use



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