

ViiV Healthcare's Stigma and Discrimination, Policy

The Issue

Positive HIV status has long been associated with stigma and discrimination. The consequences of stigma and discrimination are wide-ranging and have a significant negative impact on the overall HIV response globally.

The WHO cites fear of stigma and discrimination as the main reason why people are reluctant to get tested, disclose their HIV status and take antiretroviral drugs.¹ Not only does stigma and discrimination lead to detrimental health outcomes for individuals, but it exacerbates the impact of HIV on health systems and society as a whole. Indeed, the negative impact that stigma and discrimination has on the ability of people living with HIV (PLHIV) to progress along the care continuum and achieve viral load suppression leads to increased individual suffering, decreased overall productivity, and contributes to the expansion of the epidemic .

Protective legal and social environments for PLHIV are not yet fully established and this continues to negatively impact the response to the HIV epidemic.² In addition, many HIV-affected populations, such as people who inject drugs (PWID), sex workers, illegal migrants and men who have sex with men(MSM) are already marginalised and therefore less likely to engage with their health systems successfully.

UNAIDS has identified the need to eliminate stigma, discrimination and the punitive approaches for HIV in their 2012 Guidance Note in order "to achieve universal access to HIV prevention, treatment care and support, and to halt and reverse the epidemic." In this light, all HIV stakeholders must work together to eliminate stigma and discrimination and ensure every PLHIV is treated with dignity and respect and will not have to face the barriers of stigma and discrimination that often impede their access to health related services. Below are some of the principles that ViiV Healthcare (VHC) identifies as key to an effective response to this challenge.

VHC Core Principles

VHC is committed to the principles and practices of equal opportunities in employment. "Employment decisions will be made without regard to race, color, religion or belief, gender, sex, sexual orientation, age, ethnic or national origin or disability." This foundation in equal treatment forms the cultural basis of all of our internal and external communications and informs the focus of our Corporate Social Responsibility programming.

In order to tackle the HIV epidemic promoting the rights of PLHIV must remain at the centre of the HIV response. In particular, HIV community stakeholders should consider the points below:

- National HIV response plans must consider the impact of stigma and discrimination and incorporate policies that seek to address and minimise their impact. Programmes that

address these issues not only help protect basic human rights, but are also critical enablers to the success of a national HIV response

- Addressing stigma and discrimination requires a collaborative approach from all HIV stakeholders, including national health systems and governments, international organisations, Pharma and community partners. These partners must work together to identify national gaps and eliminate stigma and discrimination as well as promote access to justice
- Methods and programmes for monitoring HIV related stigma and discrimination must be developed and supported by all stakeholders as they help to understand the true impact that they have on PLHIV and society as a whole. Tools such as the [Stigma Index](#) can help inform policy and programme responses to address stigma and discrimination related to HIV

Conclusion

As a company 100% focused on the needs of PLHIV, we have an important role in the fight against HIV. Our commitment to have a positive impact beyond our medicines into the HIV community has always been a big part of our journey and will continue to be so. Since 1992, through our [Positive Action](#) programme we have supported marginalized and vulnerable communities affected by HIV and provided support for projects that tackle stigma and discrimination. In 2015, ViiV Healthcare is launching new programmes addressing needs of key underserved populations such as women and young girls; MSM and transgender; and adolescents. These programmes support capacity building of Community Based Organisations to deliver interventions against stigma and discrimination; and advocacy for access to healthcare services.

References:

¹ http://www.who.int/hiv/pub/progress_report2011/en/ Accessed 12.03.2015

² http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-13-466_en.htm Accessed 10.03.2015