

# Let's change the way we

## Talk about HIV

Tips to avoid using language that contributes to HIV-related stigma:

### Avoid

### Say

### Why

HIV patient, AIDS patient, positives, infected person, AIDS or HIV carrier, victim, innocent victim, suffers from HIV

**Person living with HIV**

Put the person first rather than the virus or HIV status. Focus on a person's ability to live a full, healthy life with HIV rather than victimhood or suffering.

Addict, drug addict, drug injectors, user

**People who inject drugs (PWID)**

Put the person first rather than the behavior.

Died of AIDS, to die of AIDS

**Died of AIDS-related illness, or end stage HIV**

Be accurate and don't contribute to the fear around HIV. A person can live a full, healthy life with HIV.

Full-blown AIDS

**AIDS or Stage 3 HIV**

Be accurate and don't contribute to fear around HIV. There is no medical definition for "full-blown AIDS," which implies that death is coming soon.

Compliant

**Adherent**

Focus on a person's empowerment to follow their medication regimen rather than on the doctor's orders.

Prostitute or prostitution

**Sex worker, sale of sexual services**

Avoid using words that are generally used to refer to criminal activity.

Promiscuous

**Having multiple partners**

Avoid words that imply a value judgment.

A transgender, transgendered

**Transgender man, woman, or person**

Be accurate and respectful. Transgender is an adjective for a gender identity, not a noun.



# What is stigma?

## How can we prevent it?

### What is stigma?

**HIV-related stigma** refers to negative beliefs, feelings, and attitudes toward people living with HIV, their families, and people who work with them.

#### Labeling

Assigning an attribute to a person, place, thing, or event. *Example: HIV="gay disease" or HIV/AIDS="death"*

#### Prejudice

A (negative) preconceived notion/belief leading to an emotional reaction. *Example: A doctor is afraid to provide services to a gay man because he probably has HIV.*

### Stigma

#### Stereotyping

Belief (primarily negative) about a group. *Example: "All men who have sex with men have HIV."*

#### Discrimination

Behaviors or actions that are in agreement with a belief or negative emotional response defended or encouraged by society. *Example: Avoidance, withholding health care or employment and housing opportunities.*

Source: Meyerson B, et al. 2014. <https://doi.org/10.1089/apc.2013.0238>

### HIV prevention and care efforts are negatively impacted by stigma.

When people living with HIV are faced with negative beliefs, feelings, or attitudes at health care facilities, they may be less likely to seek medical care.

### What can we do?

1. Use language that does not—intentionally or unintentionally—contribute to stigma.
2. Develop genuine, meaningful relationships with clients to ensure they feel welcome and safe in health care settings.
3. Participate in trainings and discussions around the use of language and how it impacts stigma.
4. Practice compassionate communication. It takes time and practice, and it is important that we learn from our mistakes.

When providers use non-stigmatizing language, it improves service delivery and may increase the likelihood that people will be retained in care or return for regular HIV/STI testing.

