How Comfortable Are Americans Around People With HIV? [VIDEO]

The results of GLAAD's first State of HIV Stigma Study coincide with news of a $9 million Gilead grant to fight HIV in the South.

July 27, 2020 By Trent Straube

About 60% of Americans incorrectly believe it is "important to be careful around people living with HIV to avoid catching it," while about half "feel knowledgeable about HIV." Those are just two of the findings from the first State of HIV Stigma Study, a national survey spearheaded by the LGBT advocacy group GLAAD with support from pharma giant Gilead Sciences. (GLAAD focuses its advocacy mostly on LGBT representation in media.)

Along with the survey results, GLAAD announced a $9 million multiyear grant from Gilead for two of its programs: Accelerate Compassion and Accelerate Impact. The grant arrives through Gilead's COMPASS Initiative (the name stands for "COMmitment to Partnership in Addressing HIV/AIDS in Southern States").

View this post on Instagram

It’s 2020 and only 50% of Americans feel knowledgeable about HIV. It’s time to #EndHIVStigma for good.

Read our new study on HIV stigma at the link in our bio.

A post shared by GLAAD (@glaad) on Jul 27, 2020 at 8:07am PDT

To measure HIV stigma, the survey asked 2,506 Americans ages 18 and older about HIV-related topics such as visibility, education, fears and attitudes. You can read and download the survey findings here, but below are other top-line results:

- 89% of Americans believe “there is still stigma around HIV.”
- 88% of Americans agree that “people are quick to judge those with HIV.”
- 35% of Americans believe that those living with HIV “shouldn’t have to tell others.”
- 60% of Americans agree that “HIV is a medical condition that can be treated.”
- 54% of Americans report having seen stories about people living with HIV.
- Over 90% of Americans agree with statements including “information should be readily available,” “promoting prevention should be a high priority” and “schools should provide prevention information.”
- 90% of Americans agree that “people living with HIV can live productive/happy lives” and that “great strides have been made in treatment.”

One survey question attempted to gauge how comfortable Americans would be around different kinds of people living with HIV: a coworker, a neighbor, a teacher, a family member, a partner/spouse, a person at [their] place of worship, a barber or hairstylist, and a doctor, dentist or medical professional. The responses revealed:

- Americans would be least comfortable (54% total Americans, 56% non-LGBTQ, 45% LGBTQ somewhat/strongly uncomfortable) with a doctor, dentist or medical professional living with HIV.

- 49% of Americans (51% non-LGBTQ, 40% LGBTQ) would be somewhat/strongly uncomfortable with a partner or spouse living with HIV.

- 45% of Americans (47% non-LGBTQ, 39% LGBTQ) would be somewhat/strongly uncomfortable with a barber or hairstylist living with HIV.

- LGBTQ people would be more comfortable with people living with HIV than non-LGBTQ people in every instance.

To spread the word about the survey results, numerous celebrities—including drag queen Peppermint, actresses Sheryl Lee Ralph and Selenis Leyva, TV host Michelle Visage and singer Parson James—recorded a video, which you can watch at the top of this article.

Gilead's grants support two programs that are part of the GLAAD Media Institute, which is the organization's research, training and consultation arm.

The Accelerate Compassion program will train advocates to tell their stories through both social and traditional media. The goal is to stop stigma before it starts and in the process address the gaps in the HIV care continuum—getting more people aware of their status, on treatment, in care and undetectable—with an emphasis on people of color in the South.

The Accelerate Impact program will focus on media outlets in the South, rating and working with news programs, for example, to improve their coverage of LGBT and HIV stories, including helping them develop best practices for reporting these topics.

"People living with HIV today are leading long, healthy lives and cannot transmit HIV when they receive proper treatment, but the stigma that they face has persisted for far too long and leads to harmful discrimination," said GLAAD president and CEO Sarah Kate Ellis in a GLAAD press release. "HIV issues have flown under the radar, but with advances in treatment and prevention, we urgently need to educate the public on the facts about HIV today. GLAAD's new programs will ensure that local HIV advocates are front and center throughout national and local media in an effort to educate the public and uplift stories about people living with HIV."

"Gilead is committed to going where the need is greatest to end the HIV epidemic, and there is no better partner to help us do that than GLAAD," added Amy Flood, senior vice president of public

affairs at Gilead Sciences. “This new survey gives us valuable insight into the role stigma plays as a barrier to care. The solution will require collaboration between the entire community fighting this epidemic—from scientists, to doctors and community leaders—and Gilead is proud to be a part of this effort.”

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