UPDATE: HIV Stigma Is on the Decline, GLAAD Reports. But Is That True?

HIV community leaders question the findings and research methods of GLAAD's fifth annual State of HIV Stigma report.

September 23, 2024 By Trent Straube

UPDATE: Many folks in the HIV community would like a word with LGBTQ media advocacy group GLAAD and its president and CEO Sarah Kate Ellis. Two weeks ago, GLAAD issued its annual State of HIV Stigma report and proclaimed, "Stigma is finally on the decline." That claim has sparked online discussions in which people recounted personal experiences of encountering HIV stigma. Many also pointed to an example of HIV stigma that made national news recently: Vice presidential candidate JD Vance blamed rising HIV rates in Springfield, Ohio, on Haitian immigrants (there is no evidence for his false statement).

Not only do people in the HIV community question GLAAD's finding but they also point out flaws in the report's methodology—and the fact that GLAAD hasn't consulted with people living with HIV. Leaders in the community are sending a letter to Ellis outlining their issues with the stigma report.

POZ will update this story as it develops. Below is the original news item about GLAAD's stigma report.

September 13, 2024: Is HIV stigma finally decreasing in the United States? More Americans believe so, found the 2024 State of HIV Stigma report. "For the first time in five years, [the report] found a statistically significant decline of HIV stigma in the U.S., with 85% of Americans saying they believe HIV stigma exists, down from 89% in 2020," according to a press release from LGBTQ media advocacy group GLAAD, which spearheaded the annual report in partnership with pharma giant Gilead Sciences' Gilead COMPASS Initiative.

GLAAD's fifth State of HIV Stigma report found that nearly 9 in 10 Americans know at least a little about

HIV, which is...

Posted by GLAAD on Thursday, September 12, 2024

Troublingly, though, is the finding that fewer people believe everyone should get tested for HIV (67% of respondents compared with 77% in 2020). The fifth annual report also found that Gen Z—roughly those between ages 27 and 11—is the least HIV-educated generation. Perhaps a solution to these challenges lies in another report finding. As the authors state: “Seeing more stories of people living withHIV in media is key to combating HIV stigma.”

“The state of HIV stigma in America could not be more clear: Stigma is finally on the decline, and now is the time to accelerate the education that can save lives, through sharing stories of people living with HIV,” said GLAAD president and CEO Sarah Kate Ellis in the release. “Today, nearly 90% of Americans say they know at least a little about HIV. Together with game-changing HIV prevention tools like PrEP [pre-exposure prophylaxis] and advanced HIV treatment options, we must seize the opportunity before us to close the knowledge gap between generations. GLAAD’s core work to eradicate HIV stigma and misinformation in media is more urgent than ever. Ending HIV and HIV stigma should be every generation’s lasting achievement, and we have never been closer to that accomplishment.”

Data for the HIV stigma report were gathered through an online survey of 2,511 U.S. adults conducted in January 2024.

The following are key findings from the GLAAD stigma report:

- There has been a significant decrease in the belief that stigma around HIV still exists over five years, from 89% in 2020 to 85% in 2024.

- Knowledge of HIV is mostly stable in the U.S. and in the Southern U.S. over five years, with nearly 90% of Americans knowing at least a little about HIV, and half feeling knowledgeable.

- Gen Z continues to be among the least knowledgeable generations about HIV. Only 37% of Gen Z adults are knowledgeable about HIV, which is on par with five years ago.

- Our Where We Are on TV study shows that only one LGBTQ character living with HIV was portrayed in prime time scripted television [on Showtime’s limited series Fellow Travelers]

during the most recent season and is not expected to return. There has also been a significant decrease year over year in Americans seeing people living with HIV in TV shows and/or movies, from 39% in 2023 to 35% in 2024.

- Seeing stories of people living with HIV drives up comfortability interacting with people living with HIV in various scenarios in life by up to 15%.

GLAAD and Gilead also note troubling declines over the past five years:

- We've seen a significant decrease in the belief that everyone should get tested for HIV, from 77% in 2020 to 67% in 2024. This decline is seen in all regions of the country.

- And we've seen a significant decrease in the belief that people living with HIV can live long, healthy lives, from 90% in 2020 to 85% in 2024. The Southern U.S. is the only region to see a significant decline here as well.

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A post shared by Sarah Kate Ellis (@sarahkateellis)

In the introduction to the 28-page stigma report, GLAAD's Ellis writes:

> Approximately 1.2 million people in the U.S. are living with HIV. According to the CDC [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention], gay and bisexual men account for about two thirds of new HIV diagnoses in the U.S. each year, with Black and Latine gay and bi men disproportionately impacted. The CDC also estimates that over 14% of transgender women are living with HIV.
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> Today, PrEP reduces the risk of getting HIV from sex by 99%. And treating HIV can suppress the virus to the point where it is no longer detected, allowing people living with HIV to live long and healthy lives. When HIV is undetected, it is not sexually transmittable. This is the key message of U=U (Undetectable Equals Untransmittable), and GLAAD encourages all media and notables to include U=U when speaking about HIV today.
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> While this year's Stigma Report shows that nearly 90% of Americans feel knowledgeable about HIV, fewer Americans this year report knowing that people living with HIV can live long and healthy lives. This decline is particularly seen in the U.S. South. And alarmingly, this year's State of HIV Stigma Report also showed that Gen Z, the most diverse and out LGBTQ generation in history, continued to be the least knowledgeable about HIV. GLAAD and Gilead Sciences, along with partner organizations, are leading campaigns and programs that break down information barriers on HIV, PrEP and U=U, especially for younger and underrepresented LGBTQ people.

GLAAD's 2024 State of HIV Stigma report found a significant decrease in the belief that stigma around HIV still exists...

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