Zero HIV Stigma Day Launched

In an opinion piece titled "#ZeroHIVStigmaDay: New International Awareness Day Aims to End HIV Stigma," four organizations announced the launch of this initiative. Below is an edited excerpt.

September 26, 2022

In commemoration of the birthday of the late South African AIDS activist Prudence Mabele (1971–2017), a consortium of community, medical and urban health organizations has designated July 21 as #ZeroHIVStigmaDay, a new international awareness day meant to call attention to the persistent levels of stigma experienced by people living with and affected by HIV.

The four organizations that make up the consortium are NAZ (a minority-led HIV U.K.-based agency dedicated to improving people's sexual health), the International Association of Providers of AIDS Care (IAPAC, a global network of clinicians and allied health professionals working to end the HIV pandemic), the Global HIV Collaborative and the Fast-Track Cities Institute.

"In this fifth decade of the global HIV pandemic, stigma continues to undermine progress and, in combination with fear and shame, is still driving late diagnosis of HIV in a way that is unacceptable and entirely preventable," says Parminder Sekhon, CEO of NAZ. "Building on the legacy of Prudence Mabele, a fearless and irrepressible activist, we pledge to work toward a collective day of action in her name. We have 365 days to work together to shape a seminal day of global action. If we are to have any hope of ending HIV and crossing the finishing line together, we must join forces, voice by voice, to end HIV stigma."

A recent IAPAC survey across 50 cities and municipalities worldwide found that HIV stigma remains a serious concern for 91% of respondents. According to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), people living with HIV who perceive high levels of HIV stigma are 2.4 times more likely to delay enrollment in care until they are very ill, which leads to premature death and negates the prevention benefit of successful HIV treatment.

"HIV stigma is jeopardizing our ability to end AIDS as a public health threat by 2030. By eliminating HIV stigma, we can dismantle the barriers people living with and affected by HIV confront when accessing testing, prevention and treatment services. But we must also root out inequities and inequalities exacerbated by the 'otherness' ascribed to communities affected by HIV," says José M. Zuniga, PhD, MPH, president and CEO of IAPAC and the Fast-Track Cities Institute. "Zero HIV Stigma Day, and its full year of affiliated actions, represents a concerted global effort to harness our collective power toward the aim of realizing the human right to dignity,

health and well-being for everyone everywhere.”

About Prudence Mabele and the Consortium

Prudence Mabele was the first Black South African woman to publicly share her HIV status. She was diagnosed with HIV in 1990 and went public with her status in 1992. She founded South Africa’s Positive Women’s Network in 1996. She died in 2017.

NAZ has over 30 years of grassroots experience delivering HIV care and support and evidenced-based sexual health programs to Black, brown and other minority communities.

Representing 30,000 members, IAPAC is the largest association of clinicians and allied health professionals working to end the epidemics of HIV and tuberculosis (TB) as well as eliminate hepatitis B virus and hepatitis C virus by 2030.

The Global HIV Collaborative is a partnership that strives to improve the current global trajectory of HIV outcomes for Black communities.

The Fast-Track Cities Institute was created to support cities and municipalities worldwide in their efforts to end the epidemics of HIV, TB, hepatitis B and hepatitis C.

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