



The Well Project Hosts Its First-Ever Convening Exploring Sexual Health, Pleasure, and HIV

Participants explored a range of aspects related to pleasure, discussing best practices for integrating these concepts into HIV advocacy, clinical care, public health, and beyond.

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On April 29, 2026, The Well Project hosted a virtual convening titled “The Right to Pleasure: Sexual Health, Women, and HIV.” This conversation centered on the intersections of sex, pleasure, and HIV, particularly for women living with and vulnerable to HIV across the gender spectrum. Welcoming approximately 20 multidisciplinary stakeholders including advocates, providers, researchers, and community leaders to the virtual table, the gathering aimed to enhance understanding and dialogue around these crucial topics.

- The discussion sought to uplift approaches that honor the whole person and challenge biases surrounding pleasure in sexual healthcare and HIV prevention
- Participants explored a range of aspects related to pleasure, discussing best practices for integrating these concepts into HIV advocacy, clinical care, public health, and beyond
- The conversation fostered meaningful dialogue aimed at co-creating solutions that reflect the real needs of women impacted by HIV

In preparation for the convening, participating experts completed a survey (n=18) to identify important issues related to pleasure and health among women living with HIV and with reasons for prevention. The survey investigated the most important priorities to ensure that all women across the gender spectrum have access to pleasure-centered services and pleasure-competent providers – and the most significant barriers to achieving that objective.

Highlights include:

Top priorities:

- Equip providers to engage in non-judgmental, proactive discussions about pleasure, including types of sexual pleasure and intimate relationships (67%)
- Disrupt the policing of women's bodies and promote bodily autonomy by pursuing efforts to decriminalize HIV, abortion, sex work, parenthood, and others (67%)
- Center, support, and invest in the needs, perspectives, contributions, and leadership of women living with HIV in all efforts designed to serve them (61%)
- Move beyond harmful "risk" framing and terminology (for example, "HIV risk behaviors" are also activities individuals may engage in for pleasure, survival, validation, etc.) (56%)
- Infuse medical school and continuing-education curricula with pleasure-based sexual and reproductive health, including intersections with HIV prevention and care (44%)

Top barriers:

- Ingrained beliefs and messaging among many populations in the US and beyond that downplay (or disregard) women's experiences of sexual pleasure (83%)
- Absence of the notion of pleasure as a component of sexual health throughout the US healthcare system (61%)
- Siloing of HIV concerns from other sexual and reproductive health, rights, and justice advocacy spaces in which pleasure may be more central (61%)
- Provider discomfort with conversations around pleasure (56%)
- Excessive focus by medical providers and others on viral load as the only metric for well-being for people living with HIV (56%)

Participants also offered open-ended responses to questions regarding opportunities and conversations that ought to be leveraged to broaden access to pleasure, intimacy, and sexual well-being for women affected by HIV. Many responses related to perceived gaps between clients'/community members' crucial entwined needs for trust (relatability and accessibility of information/relationships) and connection (community, friendships, the "kitchen table") and providers' ability (through education, training, accountability) to be trustworthy.

This convening is part of our [SHE/HER/THEY](#) programming focused on improving engagement in care, health outcomes, and well-being for women living with and vulnerable to HIV. We look

forward to sharing more outcomes from this illuminating conversation in the coming months!

[Read the bios of all meeting participants in The Right to Pleasure: Sexual Health, Women, and HIV](#)

The Well Project is a non-profit organization whose mission is to change the course of the HIV/AIDS pandemic through a unique and comprehensive focus on women and girls across the gender spectrum. Visit their website, www.thewellproject.org, to access fact sheets (English and Spanish), blogs, and advocacy tools, and to join a global community of women living with HIV.

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