



Unmasking Stigma, Mobilizing Resilience

The “Unmasking Stigma, Mobilizing Resilience” report released on Zero HIV Stigma Day 2025 examines stigma and offers a path forward.

July 21, 2025 By [Zero HIV Stigma](#)

Despite more than four decades of scientific breakthroughs in the global fight against HIV, one barrier continues to undermine our progress and fracture lives: stigma. It manifests in laws, health systems, classrooms, and kitchen tables. It festers in silence and spreads through misinformation. It tells people living with HIV (PLHIV) and those vulnerable to it that they are unworthy of care, love, dignity, or full participation in society.

On Zero HIV Stigma Day 2025, the [Unmasking Stigma, Mobilizing Resilience](#) report issues an urgent reminder: stigma is not just a social injustice, it is a public health crisis. This comprehensive new report released July 21, 2025, grounded in data, lived experience, and global insight, makes a compelling case that we cannot end the HIV epidemic without ending the stigma that fuels new infections and contributes to AIDS-related mortality.

From internalized shame to discriminatory policies and cultural narratives that perpetuate fear, HIV and intersectional stigma continues to impede access to testing, delay diagnoses and early treatment, reduce access to prevention, erode mental health, and silence voices that deserve to be heard. But the report does not stop at diagnosing the challenges – it provides a roadmap.

A Framework for Action Across Five Levels

Jointly published by IAPAC, GNP+, Prevention Access Campaign, and Fast-Track Cities Institute, the report outlines 25 recommendations across five levels of action – global, regional, national, municipal, and individual – recognizing that stigma is entrenched in systems and must be disrupted systemically. Whether through repealing discriminatory laws, embedding anti-stigma training into health worker curricula, or launching local recognition campaigns for “HIV Stigma Warriors,” the report’s call to action is both practical and bold.

Among the most urgent recommendations is the mainstreaming of U=U (Undetectable = Untransmittable) across global, national, and local efforts. U=U is a scientific fact: PLHIV who maintain an undetectable viral load cannot sexually transmit the virus. But it is also a profoundly human message that restores agency, dignity, and hope. The report rightly argues that U=U must be integrated into policy, education, and care delivery to dismantle fear-based stigma once and for

all.

The report takes focuses critically and unapologetic on the centering of intersectionality. Stigma does not affect everyone equally. Black and Brown LGBTQ+ individuals, transgender people, sex workers, people who use or inject drugs, incarcerated individuals, and migrants – especially those living at the intersections of multiple marginalized identities – experience stigma as a layered, daily reality.

The report takes this truth seriously. It calls for community-led solutions, cross-border networks of resilience, and platforms that elevate the leadership of those who experience stigma most acutely. These are not passive “beneficiaries,” but powerful agents of change. The report reframes them as what they are: HIV Stigma Warriors.

In its final tier of action, the report brings the conversation home to each of us. Ending stigma is not just the job of governments or healthcare providers – it is also a personal and cultural imperative. The report reminds readers that every individual has the power to challenge stigma in their everyday lives – in how we speak, vote, parent, teach, hire, and show up. It challenges us to educate ourselves, interrupt harmful narratives, and stand in solidarity with those whose voices have too often been silenced. This is not virtue signaling; it is life-saving.

HIV Stigma Warriors: The Movement and the Moment

The theme of this year’s campaign – HIV Stigma Warriors – is a tribute to those who confront stigma head-on, not just with words, but with unwavering action. They are peer navigators, lawyers, artists, clinicians, and activists. They are also everyday people – parents, friends, teachers, and coworkers – who choose compassion over fear.

An HIV Stigma Warrior is not fearless, the report reminds us, but relentless in the face of fear. HIV Stigma Warriors speak when silence is easier. They correct myths, embrace science, and champion human dignity. In 2025, HIV Stigma Warriors are not wearing armor – they are wearing community t-shirts and sometimes just the scars of survival.

A Critical Juncture: Five Years to 2030

The clock is ticking. We are now five years from the 2030 deadline to end AIDS as a public health threat, a goal enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). If we fail to prioritize stigma elimination now – in our policies, budgets, healthcare systems, and collective imagination – we risk reversing decades of hard-won progress.

But if we act decisively, stigma could become the pressure point that helps unravel other forms of injustice. As the report asserts, stigma is not just about HIV – it is about affirming life, dignity, and the right to thrive.

The Zero HIV Stigma Day 2025 Charge

In the final pages of the report, we are given a charge. If you are a policymaker: legislate with courage. If you are a health worker: treat with compassion and speak the truth about U=U. If you

are a person living with HIV: your joy and truth matter. If you are anyone else: join us.

Because in 2025, we do not need more performative gestures. We need HIV Stigma Warriors – everywhere.

This Zero HIV Stigma blog was written by Dr. José M. Zuniga, who is President/CEO of the International Association of Providers of AIDS Care (@IAPAC) and the Fast-Track Cities Institute (@FTC2030).

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