



Why Zero HIV Stigma Day Matters

It's 2023, and stigma continues to plague our HIV response. We spoke with Calvin Pugh of IAPAC about the global awareness day.

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Zero HIV Stigma Day is recognized on July 21st to represent a movement to unite people, communities, and countries to help raise awareness about HIV stigma and learn about ways to help stop it.

It's 2023, and stigma continues to plague our HIV response. We are proud that HIV leaders are working to address stigma in conjunction with Zero HIV Stigma Day, including the Presidential Advisory Committee on HIV/AIDS (PACHA). To share more about this awareness day, we talked with Calvin Pugh, Senior Advisor, Community Engagement, [International Association of Providers of AIDS Care](#)^{Exit Disclaimer}, and here are his thoughts about stigma and the awareness day.

"In the last four decades of the HIV pandemic, we have made incredible advances. To go from a death sentence in the 1980s to a now chronic condition speaks to the collaborative efforts of science, medicine, government, and most importantly, community activists who demanded action. Despite this progress, new HIV diagnoses and preventable AIDS-related deaths persist. These could be avoided were it not for the persistent stigma that surrounds the three letters—HIV.

"I've had the privilege over the last several years of meeting so many wonderful people living with HIV. I've seen and experienced first-hand the real-world harms of HIV stigma. As a peer educator in a clinic, I worked with many people who internalized hurtful, stigmatizing language and opinions and consumed them like poison. And I witnessed the real-world impact and barrier that HIV stigma can have on individuals' ability to engage in seeking treatment and care. However, I also saw the power in shared experiences and how by finding community among others, we can also find perseverance."

Zero HIV Stigma Day – A Global Day of Action

Mr. Pugh continued to share, "on July 21st, I hope you will join us as we come together for a Global Day of Action against HIV-related stigma for Zero HIV Stigma Day, a global movement uniting people and communities to raise awareness of HIV and take action to end HIV stigma. We chose July 21st to honor the life of the late incredible force that was Prudence Nobantu Mabele—a South African activist who after her diagnosis went public with her status and dedicated her life to advocating for the rights of women and children with HIV and AIDS. She did not allow her diagnosis

to define who she was or what she was capable of. This year's theme—[Human First](#)—coincides with the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, aligning with its message of acknowledging, embracing, and empowering the human rights of all people.

“We hope to remind the world—but most importantly ourselves—that HIV isn't who we are, and that the humanity in all of us is so much greater than something microscopic within us. HIV does not diminish your value. I hope you are reminded today that you are worthy of love and belonging. HIV is not bigger than your dreams or your ability to experience joy; it's not bigger than what you care about, and it does not limit your ability to change the world. It is time for those of us living with HIV to come together and remember that before we are people living with HIV, we are human first.”

Zero HIV Stigma Day campaign materials

Courtesy of the Zero HIV Stigma Day campaign

We are also very proud of our PACHA partners who have recently passed a resolution, “From Vision to Reality: A Call to End HIV Stigma,” which defines HIV stigma and discusses the harms that it causes. [Please read this blog post about their activities.](#)

In closing, we remind individuals that the [National HIV/AIDS Strategy](#) (NHAS) calls for the reduction of HIV-related stigma and discrimination. Additionally, it calls on all sectors of society to work collaboratively to combat stigma and discrimination to reduce new transmissions and improve

health outcomes for people with HIV via addressing structural barriers to HIV prevention and care and the repeal of outdated HIV criminalization laws, among other strategies.

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