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# HIV STIGMA

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## ATTITUDES NEED TO CHANGE

It's a sad fact that people living with HIV have been stigmatised and discriminated against since the virus was first discovered in the 1980s. And all too often, the reasons for this stigma come from a lack of knowledge in society. These include:

- A fear of conditions that can be passed between people
- The associations with, and images of, people dying of AIDS
- Groups affected by the condition that are already discriminated against in society i.e. drug users, gay men and black Africans

## LIVING WITH PREJUDICE

Today, people with HIV still regularly face discrimination – and this means they are often reluctant to tell other people they are HIV positive. The sort of issues they face include:

- Being excluded from everyday activities
- Being gossiped about
- Being rejected by friends, family or partners
- Being verbally abused
- Even being physically assaulted

Because of this, they may struggle to keep taking their medications and live as well as they could do. So as a result of prejudice, many people are less able to achieve their full potential.

## FEAR SPREADS

HIV stigma also contributes to the spread of HIV as it means that people are scared to go for a test. If someone does not know that they are HIV positive, they may unknowingly infect other people. What's more, people's fear of testing means that they are often diagnosed late, leading to severe long-term health implications. The earlier HIV is detected, the more effective the treatment and higher the chance of maintaining good health.

## DISCRIMINATION AND THE LAW

The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 provides legal protection from discrimination for anyone living with HIV. This includes protection in the areas of employment, healthcare and housing. Anyone treating someone less favourably than others because of their HIV status can now be prosecuted.

