

Stigma Reduction is a Smart Investment

Reducing HIV-related stigma and discrimination in health facilities is key to achieving and maintaining epidemic control. Stigma and discrimination hinder HIV prevention and negatively impact all stages of the treatment cascade. As countries approach epidemic control, stigma reduction becomes increasingly important—those most affected by stigma are often those most vulnerable to HIV and hardest for prevention and treatment services to reach and retain.

The three-phased Health Policy Plus (HP+) “total facility” approach to stigma and discrimination reduction in health facilities is evidence-based, adaptable, and scalable. It has proven successful in generalized and concentrated epidemic settings and can be tailored to address stigma toward any population. HP+, in collaboration with local partners, tested the approach in Ghana with a focus on key populations (sex workers, people who inject drugs, and men who have sex with men) and in Tanzania with a focus on youth.

PHASE 1: ASSESSMENT

HP+ conducted **quantitative baseline surveys** of health facility staff and clients living with HIV, followed by **participatory dissemination and validation of results** with facility staff. Together, these informed intervention design, catalyzed action, and generated strong ownership and buy-in by involving facility management and staff in diagnosing the problem.

PHASE 2: INTERVENTION

Health facility staff (all levels and cadres—clinical and non-clinical) attended two days of **participatory stigma-reduction workshops** facilitated by facility staff and clients living with HIV (including youth in Tanzania and key populations in Ghana). Facilitators, selected in consultation with facility management, were trained using guides created based on global tools and survey findings. Training schedules and groups were crafted with facility management to minimize disruption of service delivery and mix staff departments, levels, and cadres to build relationships and spread learning across the facility.

IMPRESSIVE RESULTS

Significant reductions in drivers and manifestations of stigma and discrimination among health facility staff, including:

- Worry about HIV transmission (↓50% in Tanzania; ↓27% in Ghana)
- Stigmatizing avoidance behaviors (↓50% in Tanzania; ↓24% in Ghana)
- Stigmatizing attitudes about people living with HIV (↓35% in Tanzania; ↓9% in Ghana)
- Hesitancy to test for HIV (self-reported) (↓34% in Tanzania; ↓9% in Ghana)

Transformed facility environments and improved quality of care:

- Fewer instances of observed discrimination toward people living with HIV, sexually active adolescents, and unmarried pregnant adolescents
- Fewer clients reported having experienced discrimination at the facility in the past three months
- Staff expressed increased willingness to care for key populations
- Clients and staff reported improved staff behavior in comparison with pre-intervention

Sustainable Solutions. Staff used their new skills to design and carry out stigma-reduction activities tailored to facility needs and contexts and integrated into existing structures and processes to achieve lasting change. Activities included:

- Creating teams of stigma-reduction “champions”
- Drafting and posting codes of conduct
- Publicizing commitments to stigma-free care through banners, posters, loudspeaker announcements, and community TV and radio spots
- Establishing accountability mechanisms—such as client feedback systems and programs to recognize staff for providing stigma-free care—and integrating these into existing management and performance systems



PHASE 3: EVALUATION

Success was measured through a **quantitative survey** of health facility staff and clients, focusing on pre- and post-intervention trends among staff and using client data to triangulate and support staff data. In Ghana, the inclusion of comparison facilities allowed for difference-of-differences analysis—helping demonstrate that changes resulted from the intervention.

Keys to Success. The HP+ total facility approach is an effective, versatile, and scalable approach that lends itself to sustainable stigma reduction. Keys to success include:

- Involving all staff in stigma-reduction efforts to transform the facility environment
- Holding sessions at facilities to reduce cost, enable more staff to participate, and strengthen ownership
- Engaging facility management throughout
- Using participatory training methods and having health facility staff and clients living with HIV (including youth and key populations) facilitate sessions, deepening impact and ensuring interventions are appropriately tailored and targeted
- Building staff capacity and institutionalizing interventions, which enhances sustainability—some facilities have made stigma reduction part of the onboarding process for new staff

LEARN MORE

The Tanzania and Ghana facilitator’s guides and intervention results—as well as more information about HP+’s work to reduce stigma and discrimination in health facilities for improved health outcomes—are available at: www.healthpolicyplus.com/stigma.cfm.

CONTACTS

Kent Klindera, MPH
Senior Technical Advisor, Key Populations
USAID Office of HIV/AIDS
kklindera@usaid.gov

Sara Bowsky, BScN, RN, MPH
Deputy Director for HIV, HP+
Palladium
sara.bowsky@thepalladiumgroup.com

Health Policy Plus (HP+) is a five-year cooperative agreement funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development under Agreement No. AID-OAA-A-15-00051, beginning August 28, 2015. The project’s HIV activities are supported by the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). HP+ is implemented by Palladium, in collaboration with Avenir Health, Futures Group Global Outreach, Plan International USA, Population Reference Bureau, RTI International, ThinkWell, and the White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood.

This publication was produced for review by the U.S. Agency for International Development. It was prepared by HP+. The information provided in this document is not official U.S. Government information and does not necessarily reflect the views or positions of the U.S. Agency for International Development or the U.S. Government.