



# NORTHREACH

July 2020

Aware Newsletter

This month's newsletter is going to be about stigma and HIV-related stigma.


What is stigma? Stigma is defined as: "a mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person." A sentence using the word: "the stigma of having gone to prison will always be with me." Some synonyms of the word stigma include shame, disgrace, and dishonour. There are many stigmatized health conditions in our society. Some of these health conditions are HIV, obesity, mental health, and substance use. When an individual has one of these stigmatized conditions, they are seen in a negative way simply because of their health status. Often people with stigmatized health issues receive different treatment than others, not just in their day to day lives, but also within the healthcare system.



A recent article from HIV Plus Magazine displayed the findings from the GLAAD (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) *State of HIV Stigma Study*. One of the major findings of this study noted that there is still a lot of stigma surrounding HIV, coupled with a lack of knowledge about the virus and well as prevention and treatment strategies. While this is an American study, we believe that there would be similar findings in Canada as well.

Stigma and lack of knowledge go hand in hand. When we don't know about something like HIV (which we've always been told is dangerous) we fear it, and ultimately end up treating people living with HIV differently as well. Northreach aims to destigmatize health conditions like HIV so that those living with the virus receive fair and equal treatment wherever they are, whether it's in a relationship, in a doctor's office, or at a gym. So here are some important, destigmatizing facts about HIV!



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1. Transmission of HIV only occurs by one of the 5 bodily fluids of an infected person with a detectable viral load entering the body of an uninfected person. Those bodily fluids are:
  - a. Blood
  - b. Semen (including pre-ejaculate)
  - c. Breastmilk
  - d. Vaginal Fluid
  - e. Anal Fluid


That means that HIV is NOT transmitted by touching another person, through tears or sweat, or through sharing food with them. Misinformation about transmission can be a huge contributor to stigmatizing individuals living with HIV.



2. There is treatment available for those living with HIV, which allows them to live a long and healthy life!
3. U=U or, Undetectable = Untransmittable. A person living with HIV and maintaining a regular medication regimen can get the virus levels in their body to the undetectable level, which means they will not be able to pass on HIV to a sexual partner!

Another important piece of destigmatizing is correcting people's mistakes as well. Presenting people who are unaware of their stigmatizing behaviour with knowledge that can dissolve that belief is important. We don't know what we don't know, so if we all work together to spread correct information around, we can become more aware of our actions and how it affects others. We hope that we can continue to destigmatize HIV and the people living with this virus!



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