

- Stigma often leads to discrimination and this, in turn, leads to human rights violations for people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) and their families. Stigma and discrimination fuel the HIV/AIDS epidemic. They hamper prevention and care efforts by sustaining silence and denial about HIV/AIDS as well as reinforcing the marginalization of PLWHA and those who are particularly vulnerable to HIV infection.
- Discrimination occurs when negative thoughts lead people or institutions to take, or omit to take, action that treats a person unfairly and unjustly on the basis of their presumed or actual HIV/AIDS status. Such discriminatory acts, based on presumed or actual HIV status, are a violation of human rights.
- Another form of stigma arises through internalization by PLWHA of their negative perceptions of themselves. The stigma and discrimination associated with disease can have powerful psychological consequences for how people living with HIV/AIDS come to see themselves—leading, in some cases, to depression, lack of self-worth and despair.
- Stigma and discrimination also undermine prevention efforts by making people afraid to find out whether or not they are infected, or may cause those who are infected to continue unsafe behaviours for fear of raising suspicion about their HIV-positive status. And they can cause people with HIV/AIDS to be erroneously seen as some kind of ‘problem’, rather than as part of the solution to containing and managing the epidemic.
- In many countries, laws, policies and regulations have contributed towards the development of a supportive environment for HIV/AIDS prevention, care and support. But even in places where supportive policies and legislation exist, nonexistent or weak enforcement of these laws may facilitate the perpetuation of stigma and discrimination; this is because there is often little accountability for discriminatory action or redress for those who have been stigmatized and discriminated against. Systems can also create and reinforce stigma and discrimination through laws, regulations and policies that expressly discriminate against people living with or affected by HIV/AIDS.
- With its focus on stigma and discrimination, the World AIDS Campaign hopes to encourage people to break the silence and the barriers to effective HIV/AIDS prevention and care. Only by confronting stigma and discrimination will the fight against HIV/AIDS be won.



**Stigma and
Discrimination**