



Hearts and Minds: innovative training to address HIV stigma in mainstream healthcare settings

HIV stigma has a negative impact on the wellbeing of people living with HIV and it threatens their access to high quality healthcare. Lack of basic HIV information and stigmatising attitudes in the health workforce contribute to this inequality. Training to address HIV stigma among healthcare staff is a priority in England's HIV Action Plan, and Hearts and Minds is a creative, value-based training pack that answers this call.

About HIV stigma and health

As HIV is historically associated with stigmatised social identities, and because it is also a sexually transmitted infection, HIV stigma reinforces social inequalities such as those embedded in homophobia, racism, sexism and xenophobia.

Treatment advances and their implications are poorly understood. The 2021 [HIV: Public knowledge and attitudes](#) UK survey found:

- 1 in 5 could confidently identify the main routes of HIV transmission in the UK, contributing to a potential “excess of caution” that the researchers noted among most participants.
- 1 in 8 were aware that HIV treatment stops HIV from being transmitted.
- 1 in 3 fully agreed they have sympathy for all people living with HIV regardless of how they acquired it.

Low levels of knowledge and stigmatising attitudes keep many people living with HIV away from relevant help and support, including general healthcare. A [national survey of people living with HIV](#) (Positive Voices, 2017) revealed that 1 in 20 people living with HIV had been refused or delayed treatment in general healthcare, and 1 in 12

were treated differently because of their HIV status. The broader health impacts for people living with HIV are profound, as 1 in 10 avoided seeking healthcare because of their HIV status, and 1 in 3 are not comfortable discussing their HIV with a GP.

[HIV Action Plan: annual update to Parliament 2023](#) sees the prioritisation of HIV training for people working in health settings, led by a Workforce Task and Finish group that will consider and recommend appropriate, targeted interventions for healthcare staff.

How to achieve change

Research evidence demonstrates that successful HIV anti-stigma interventions need to be strategic, institutionally supported, with an opportunity to build skills rather than just learn information ([Brown et al 2003](#); [Li et al 2014](#); [Nyblade et al 2009](#); [Stangl et al 2013](#)).

UK healthcare staff will deliver the best care for patients living with HIV when given the opportunity to reflect on HIV stigma and practice communication skills, while also updating their HIV knowledge.

Many existing HIV stigma interventions focus only on knowledge sharing, which tends to avoid exploration of the **attitudes** and **values**

that all too frequently result in people living with HIV being exposed to discrimination and stigma.

Hearts and Minds is a creative and collaborative training resource that directly responds to the healthcare workforce training priorities outlined in England's HIV Action Plan. Healthcare leaders and commissioners can recommend the use of this training resource in their areas alongside other forms of culturally competent intervention to reduce HIV stigma in all health settings.



Hearts and Minds: what is it and how does it work?

The Hearts and Minds website provides a trainer handbook, training slides and videos that local trainers can use to deliver an institutionally engaged, skills based and interactive workshop (intended as a 2 hour full workshop session, but also available as shorter 1 hour, or 30 minute versions). This training is relevant for everyone that works in healthcare, regardless of their role.

The training package was co-designed by community experts with lived and professional experience, including people living with HIV who ALSO work in healthcare. The project has incorporated creative methods to facilitate discussion and reflection on inequalities at all stages of design and delivery.

“Because art helped us move through difficult conversations, it helped communicate shared feelings – pain, shame, joy, acceptance, change - and an in-depth understanding of each other.”

Training co-developer

Evaluation findings

This training resource has been piloted with hospital staff working at University Hospitals Bristol and Weston Trust, evaluated with the use of a pre- and post-training survey (23 respondents).

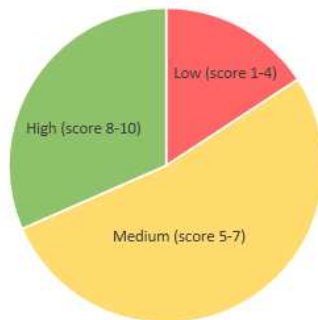
Trainees commented that Hearts and Minds supports them to reflect on broader aspects of professional practice.

“As a healthcare professional, it feels like you have to know everything and that it's not okay to admit that you are not sure. However, I was forced to reflect on this when we discussed that people living with HIV would rather someone put their hands up and acknowledge that they don't know enough about HIV, than ignore the issue or say/do the wrong things [...] it's okay not to be an expert in every field.”

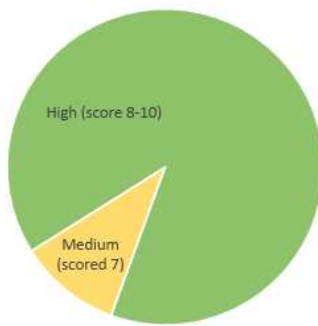
Hearts and Minds trainee

- The evaluation demonstrates that most started with low / medium confidence about discussing HIV with someone who was living with the virus. Afterwards, staff members **all reported much improved confidence**.
- Every attendee agreed or strongly agreed that because of the training, they now had clear ideas about **how to create a workplace that is more welcoming** for people living with HIV.

Confidence discussing HIV before training



Confidence discussing HIV after training



Why use Hearts and Minds?

The 2 hour training is based on HIV stigma reduction evidence, which shows that instead of only providing information, effective change demands reflection, interaction and skills development.

Using nationally consistent materials which can also be edited, local trainers can tailor delivery to include information that is meaningful within their area of the UK and for their healthcare provider audience.

Commissioners and local providers can therefore find flexible ways to make use of this package, employing local skilled trainers.

This training was developed by experts with a blend of lived and professional experience. It will be ideal for people who have a similar mix of expertise in your locality to become local Hearts and Minds trainers.

Flexible duration

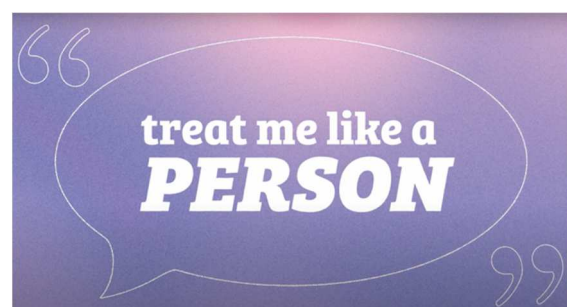
2-hour version: opening reflection session that builds trust; slides and multimedia content that covers HIV basics and impact of HIV stigma on health; extended small group discussion tasks that support action for change.

1 hour version: similar to the two hour version above, but there is slightly less time for small group work. Individual reflection and whole group discussion takes part at the outset and again before the closing.

30-minute version: key information points, key videos and some limited time for reflections and questions with facilitators.

Key practice messages within the training

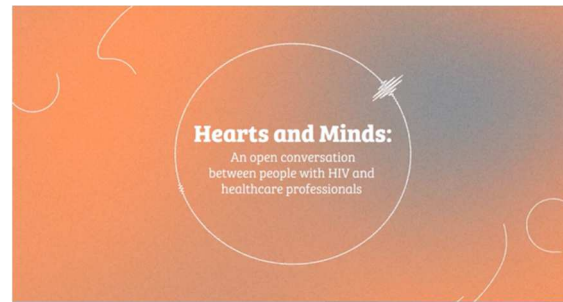
- Most people diagnosed with HIV in the UK who are on treatment have undetectable viral loads making it impossible to pass on HIV.
- Fear of stigma in healthcare has a major impact on health access for many people living with HIV.
- When you need to communicate about HIV with a patient, explaining your intent increases patient trust.



Further information

Healthcare and Allied Health Care Professionals can include Hearts and Minds training as evidence of Continuing Professional Development (CPD). This package has been accredited by the Royal College of Physicians (2 CPD points).

Please contact catherine.dodds@bristol.ac.uk if you would benefit from implementation support or exemplars to include Hearts and Minds in annual learning and development plans or commissioning specifications.



Hearts and Minds training plan, video, slides, and a trainer's handbook are free and available from: www.hivheartsminds.com

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Project development partners, with funding from the HIV, Sexual Health and Reproductive Health Innovation Fund, DHSC.

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