REDUCING STIGMA

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STIGMA IS DEFINED AS:

- The experience of being ‘deeply discredited’ or marked due to one’s ‘undesired differentness’. To be stigmatized is to be held contempt, shunned or rendered socially invisible because of a socially disapproved status.
STIGMA FROM INDIVIDUALS:

Occurs when individuals/the public develop and sustains negative stereotypes and assumptions about individuals; can be verbal or physical.

- Some examples:
  - Drug related - When people lock up their valuables when a drug user visits; calling people junkies; assumptions that health care providers make about drug users as aggressive or seeking drugs.
  - Non-Drug related –
    When people talk louder to blind people; not wanting touch people who are disabled or ill.
INSTITUTIONAL STIGMA:

- Occurs when assumptions and stereotypes are translated into public policy, practice and funding decisions.

- Some examples: Drug related – Treatment guidelines that exclude drug users (HCV); urine screening at methadone programs; hiring practices around drug use.

- Non-Drug related – Laws that impose criminal penalties on spitting by people who are HIV+; laws that limit the rights of gay men and lesbians; bathroom policies that exclude transgender individuals.
STIGMA (INTERNALIZED): OCCURS WHEN INDIVIDUALS BELIEVE AND ADOPT NEGATIVE STEREOTYPES AND ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THEMSELVES.

- Some examples: Drug related:
  Drug users stigmatize themselves, feeling that they are “bad” people; that they don’t “deserve” services or respect – often results in a “why bother” attitude; that people think of them as liars, so they might as well lie. Not being able to be honest with themselves about their own use because of what it means to be a drug user.

- Non-Drug related:
  People with learning disabilities stigmatize themselves as less capable than others; people with HIV stigmatize themselves and blame themselves for their illness.
STIGMA BY ASSOCIATION: OCCURS WHEN ASSUMPTIONS AND STEREOTYPES ARE MADE BASED ON ASSOCIATION WITH STIGMATIZED INDIVIDUALS/GROUPS

- Some examples: Drug related – Providers working with drug users are stigmatized; harm reduction providers are stigmatized by abstinence-based providers; people are stigmatized for going to a Syringe Access Program; even wearing a harm reduction t-shirt; having a family-member who is a drug user.

- Non-Drug related – Having a family member who is mentally ill; working with prisoners; Sister Helen Prejean (featured in the movie Dead Man Walking) for working with a man on death row.
## LANGUAGE MATTERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words to avoid</th>
<th>Words to use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addict</td>
<td>Person with substance use disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcoholic</td>
<td>Person with alcohol use disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug problem, drug habit</td>
<td>Substance use disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug abuse</td>
<td>Drug misuse, harmful use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug abuser</td>
<td>Person with substance use disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean</td>
<td>Abstinent, not actively using</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dirty</td>
<td>Actively using</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A clean drug screen</td>
<td>Testing negative for substance use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A dirty drug screen</td>
<td>Testing positive for substance use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former/reformed addict/alcoholic</td>
<td>Person in recovery, person in long-term recovery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opioid replacement, methadone maintenance</td>
<td>Medications for addiction treatment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RACE

- Institutional Racism:
  - Harsher drug sentences for people of color vs white cocaine users
- In 1986, before the enactment of federal mandatory minimum sentencing for crack cocaine offenses, the average federal drug sentence for African Americans was 11% higher than for whites. Four years later, the average federal drug sentence for African Americans was 49% higher.
“Mandatory minimum” means just what it says: A person convicted of a first offense of possessing five grams of crack had to be sentenced to five years in federal prison. By contrast, under the 1986 Act a coke-snorting user had to be caught with 100 times that amount of powder cocaine (500 grams, or over a pound) in order to face a similar five-year mandatory minimum sentence.
ECONOMICS

- Impacts a person’s available resources for:
  - Insurance
  - Access to services
  - Housing
The poverty rate among African Americans is high. The **socioeconomic issues** associated with poverty—including limited access to high-quality health care, housing, and HIV prevention education—directly and indirectly increase the risk for HIV infection and affect the health of people living with and at risk for HIV. These factors may explain why African Americans have worse outcomes on the **HIV continuum of care**, including lower rates of linkage to care and viral suppression.
PERSONAL ASSUMPTIONS REGARDING DRUG USE

• What are your personal beliefs about people who use drugs?
• Do you have a bias based on the type of drugs and method of use?
• Do you believe drug use is a “disease” or a moral failing?
REFERENCES

Sources: CDC. Estimated HIV incidence and prevalence in the United States 2010–2016

Drug Policy Alliance ; Drug Use and Stigma

REFERENCES

• The Office of National Drug Control Policy
  Harm Reduction Coalition

• Crack vs Powder Cocaine: One Drug, Two Penalties: By Deborah C. England

• Drug Policy Alliance