

CHANGES IN HIV AND STI STIGMA EXPRESSED BY AUSTRALIAN HEALTH CARE WORKERS: RESULTS FROM THE STIGMA INDICATORS MONITORING PROJECT 2021-2022

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Background:

Stigma is widely recognised as a fundamental cause of health inequity. The expression of stigma towards people living with HIV (PLHIV) and people with STIs (PWSTIs) by health care workers has implications for each step of the care cascade.

Methods:

Repeated, cross-sectional surveys of Australian health care workers were conducted as part of the Stigma Indicators Monitoring Project. Data were included from 2021-2022. Differences over time in participants' self-reported likelihood of expressing stigma and witnessing their colleagues express stigma towards PLHIV and PWSTIs were assessed with logistic regression.

Results:

2,900 survey responses were included. The mean age was 33.3 years, 84.4% were female, 79.9% Australian-born, 46.3% had been working in health care for more than five years. Between 2021-2022 the proportion who would never behave negatively towards PLHIV increased from 62.8% to 67.8% (OR=1.25, $p=.008$), while there were decreases in the proportions who would sometimes (10.3%-7.9%, OR=.75, $p=.035$) or often (4.6%-2.0%, OR=.41, $p<.001$) behave negatively towards PLHIV. The proportion who would never behave negatively towards PWSTIs remained stable (57.3%-60.2%, OR=1.12, $p=.151$), however, there were decreases in the proportions who would sometimes (16.4%-11.3%, OR=.65, $p<.001$) or often (3.9%-2.0%, OR=.51, $p=.004$) behave negatively towards PWSTIs. Witnessing negative behaviour from colleagues decreased between 2021 and 2022. The proportion who witnessed any negative behaviour towards PLHIV in the past 12 months decreased from 38.1% to 30.7% (OR=.72, $p<.001$) and the proportion who witnessed any negative behaviour towards PWSTIs decreased from 42.5% to 34.4% (OR=.71, $p<.001$).

Conclusion:

Expression of stigma towards PLHIV and PWSTIs decreased among Australian health care workers between 2021 and 2022. Ongoing monitoring is necessary to determine the extent of any long-term change, as well as identify areas where stigma and discrimination are most likely to persist.

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