

HIV Prevention England Faith Engagement Strategy 2019/20



For many people faith is a source of personal strength and hope. Faith-led or faith-based institutions and organisations provide membership to a community which can be a source of comfort to those going through challenging personal circumstances. Additionally, through their faith people are often called upon to show compassion, forgiveness and understanding to themselves and those around them. Faith leaders and communities therefore have unique opportunities to promote good health, including HIV prevention and sexual health behaviours, and are able to support people of faith living with HIV in tackling stigma and discrimination.

As a priority, HIV Prevention England (HPE) aims to engage and collaborate with faith leaders to reduce HIV stigma and help increase their participation in HIV prevention and testing. This strategy seeks to build on the strong track record of supporting engagement with faith leaders and faith communities. There is an appetite to develop and expand on this work following successful engagement on these projects.

HPE will support faith leaders and communities, through the **It Starts With Me** campaign and **National HIV Testing Week**; providing patient resources, information briefings for faith leaders, and development of training events.



Background

To successfully promote HIV prevention and reduce HIV stigma in the UK it is essential to engage different areas that have an influence on the lives of those affected.

Engagement with faith leaders and communities is appropriate given that:

- Faith leaders are well-respected role models within the communities they serve and many are already established champions in promoting the health and wellbeing of their followers.
- In their influential roles they have the potential to reach people who are not currently accessing health services.
- They are able to encourage key communities to support and empathise with people living with HIV and help to eradicate stigma and discrimination.
- Research commissioned by Public Health England (PHE) in 2017 found that 70% of people living with HIV were religious or spiritual, of which 49% said that their religion was very or fairly important to them (Changing Perceptions – [Talking about HIV and attitudes report](#), 2018).
- The same research also revealed that 18% of people who said religion is very important to them have not shared their HIV status with anyone. Of those who said religion was not important this was lower at 10%.

Faith leaders and communities experience a range of challenges that have had an impact on the delivery of HIV prevention messages in the past. Key challenges include:

- A lack of up-to-date awareness of HIV information, especially transmission and the latest biomedical prevention efforts such as Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and Treatment as Prevention (TasP).
- Limited financial and resource capacity to attend or contribute to training and educational seminars.
- Lack of formal communication frameworks within independent faith institutions and other religious bodies within which to cascade information and knowledge through leadership chains and with all attendees.
- Religious and cultural beliefs restricting some faith leaders' freedom to speak openly about sexual health, including HIV prevention and stigma.

Summer campaign 2019:
COMBINATION PREVENTION

The collage consists of four posters, each with a different background color and a central figure:

- Top Left (Pink background):** A man in a light blue shirt and shorts. Text: **I'M STOPPING HIV. I take PrEP.** Below: **PrEP is a pill that stops me getting HIV.** At the bottom: **Find out all the ways to stop HIV StartsWithMe.org.uk**
- Top Right (Yellow background):** A man in a light blue shirt. Text: **I'M STOPPING HIV. I'm on treatment.** Below: **People on effective HIV treatment can't pass on the virus** At the bottom: **Find out all the ways to stop HIV StartsWithMe.org.uk**
- Bottom Left (Yellow background):** A woman in a colorful patterned dress. Text: **I'M STOPPING HIV. I test regularly.** Below: **Most people get HIV from someone who doesn't know they have it** At the bottom: **Find out all the ways to stop HIV StartsWithMe.org.uk**
- Bottom Right (Pink background):** A man in a white t-shirt. Text: **I'M STOPPING HIV. I use condoms.** Below: **Choose a condom with the perfect fit** At the bottom: **Find out all the ways to stop HIV StartsWithMe.org.uk**

Each poster also features the 'IT STARTS WITH ME' logo and the 'TERRANCE HIGGINS TRUST' logo.



Vision

The faith engagement strategy aims to increase the involvement of faith leaders and communities in challenging HIV-related stigma, supporting the uptake of HIV testing and prevention, and promoting the good health and wellbeing of people living with HIV.

Aims

- To set out our approach to engaging faith leaders and communities.
- To provide opportunities for faith leaders to be involved in and supported by HPE.
- To support HIV service providers with the resources they need to engage faith communities.

Focus

This strategy will focus the HPE programme remit and resources which add value, avoid duplication, and deliver a feasible range of actions to existing faith-based work.

Scope and Approach

HPE will prioritise engagement with faith leaders and communities in areas where rates of HIV are the highest in England, and those who work closely with communities affected by HIV including black African and LGBT+ people.

We will work in conjunction with faith leaders and communities in delivering our strategy, as well as HIV specialists, clinicians, commissioners of HIV prevention services and other stakeholders.

HPE recognise that faith-based work is often nurtured through key relationships that individuals and organisations develop over time, working closely with their own local communities.

Through this strategy, HPE seeks to fill in key gaps to existing faith-based programmes – rather than leading the sector's overall work in this area.

Strategies

- 1** Produce communications in partnership with faith leaders and influencers to disseminate core campaign messages and address HIV-related stigma:
 - i** Involving influential faith leaders from national faith organisations.
 - ii** Supplying content for important and influential faith-based websites, blogs and newsletters including Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Jewish and other faith organisations and networks, inclusive of interfaith networks and LGBT+ faith-based organisations.
 - iii** Producing a video message for World AIDS Day with influential faith leaders with a focus on a pledge to end HIV-related stigma.
- 2** Support HPE [Local Activation Partners](#) to deliver faith leader training workshops using tailored campaign resources.
- 3** Facilitate a faith-based workshop session during the HPE Conference 2020 and provide allocation for at least 20 faith leaders to attend.

Evaluation

The engagement strategies will be evaluated on a regular basis to measure performance and assess areas for improvement.

Before applying any strategies, we will measure the level of engagement across all channels and compare this to subsequent engagement on a regular basis.

Conclusion

Increasing faith leader and community engagement in HIV testing, prevention and challenging HIV-related stigma will require a nuanced, tiered approach that is targeted according to local needs, resources and the level of current engagement.

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