

ISSUES ON DISABILITY and HIV and AIDS

People with disabilities (PWDs) are potentially vulnerable to HIV transmission due to their social marginalization and poverty, lack of knowledge and obstacles to accessing HIV programmes. There is a multiplicity of needs of PWDs as diverse as their disability groups. Service providers are not live to the needs and preferences of PWDs in the mainstream HIV/AIDS interventions and therefore addressing the risks that PWDs are exposed to in HIV transmission.

The issues that that are critical in mainstreaming disability into HIV /AIDS programming emanate from the following practical examples:

- ❖ Service providers may OR lack knowledge about disability issues and at times may have misinformed or stigmatizing attitudes towards PWDs (PWDs are considered not to be sexually active)
- ❖ Services offered at clinics & hospitals may be physically inaccessible if located in buildings that lack mobility services, lack sign language facilities or fail to provide information in alternative formats such as Braille.
- ❖ Confidentiality for PWDs in HIV testing & counselling may be compromised, for example, by the need for a personal assistant or a sign language interpreter to be present in order to access HIV-related service
- ❖ Where PWDs are receiving HIV treatment, health professionals may not pay attention to potentially negative drug interactions between HIV treatment & the medications that PWDs are taking. Some medications may actually worsen the health status of persons with mental health

The following are what PWDs demand in HIV/AIDS interventions:

- ❖ Eliminate stigmatizing attitudes and misinformation about PWDs in health centres and hospitals.
- ❖ Establish language-appropriate HIV prevention programmes and provide HIV information in tailored formats for people from different disability groups i.e. sign language and Braille for the hearing and visually impaired respectively.
- ❖ Provide comprehensive HIV testing, treatment, care & support services which adhere fully to ethical principles such as confidentiality and the need for free and informed consent
- ❖ Provide persons with disabilities with the same range and quality of affordable HIV, sexual and reproductive health services as the rest of the population, for example ART and PMTCT services must be well explained to the hearing and visually impaired
- ❖ Ensure that persons with disabilities are appropriately supported to train and engage in HIV counselling and care provision

- ❖ Provide adequate training and support for personal assistants or people who support persons with disabilities in households affected by HIV
- ❖ PWDs have the right to participate in decisions which affect their lives, and should be fully involved in the design, implementation & evaluation of HIV policies & programmes
- ❖ Must strive to remove barriers to physical and information access, and ensure equal opportunity in practice as well as address the severe inadequacies in supports and services for many PWDs and their families