



INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY OF WOMEN LIVING WITH HIV EASTERN AFRICA (ICWEA)

ICWEA Statement for Zero Discrimination Day 2026

Dignity, Inclusion, and Stigma-Free Healthcare for All

On Zero Discrimination Day, 1 March 2026, the **International Community of Women Living with HIV Eastern Africa (ICWEA)** joins the global community in affirming the right of every person to live a full and productive life with dignity.

This year's observance underscores the importance of sustaining progress, standing with communities, and sharing facts to end stigma and discrimination. Persistent discrimination against people living with and at risk of HIV continues to undermine access to health services, violate human rights, and slow progress toward ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030.

Evidence from the People Living with HIV Stigma Index 2.0 shows that stigma and discrimination remain significant barriers to health, dignity, and human rights. Many people living with HIV report experiencing stigma, including in healthcare settings, where trust and access to life-saving services are essential. **Fear of judgment or rejection can lead individuals to delay testing, avoid prevention services, or interrupt treatment.**

Despite medical advancements that have transformed HIV into a manageable chronic condition, **the reality for women and girls living with HIV remains fraught with stigma and discrimination manifestations in the clinical and community settings.** For women living with HIV, stigma often intersects with gender inequality, economic vulnerability, and harmful social norms. Many women continue to experience violations of their reproductive rights, coercion, or mistreatment within healthcare settings.

Healthcare facilities, intended to be spaces of healing, are frequently cited as primary sites of discrimination. Reports indicate that approximately one in four people living with HIV have faced discrimination when seeking non-HIV-related healthcare. For women, this often manifests as:

- **Reproductive Coercion:** Pressure to undergo medical procedures, including family planning (sterilisation), cervical Cancer screening, or abortions, with no respect for human dignity and human rights principles but based on their HIV status.
- **Breach of Confidentiality:** Unauthorized disclosure of a woman's status to her partner or family members by medical staff

- **Neglect and Abuse:** Verbal harassment,, negative attitudes of health workers or lower quality of care compared to HIV-negative patients.
- Strengthening systems to ensure respectful, confidential, and responsive care is essential to restoring trust and improving health outcomes.

Dignity in healthcare also means ensuring access to a full range of HIV prevention choices that are safe, effective, and responsive to diverse needs. Women and girls benefit from options that support autonomy and privacy, including discreet methods such as the PrEP ring, particularly in contexts where stigma or unequal power dynamics make open use of prevention methods difficult. Expanding prevention choice empowers individuals to make informed decisions and strengthens confidence in health services.

On this Zero Discrimination Day, **ICWEA calls for collective action to strengthen inclusive, stigma-free environments:**

- Promote stigma-free healthcare through confidentiality, compassionate care, and continuous learning for health providers.
- Expand access to comprehensive HIV prevention choices, including woman-centered and discreet options, to support autonomy and reduce stigma-related barriers.
- Address stigma in communities by promoting accurate information and fostering empathy and understanding.
- Support community-led responses, ensuring meaningful participation of women living with HIV in policies and programmes that affect their lives.
- Advance enabling policies and practices that protect rights and promote equitable access to services for all.

When people feel safe and respected, they are more likely to seek testing, access prevention options, adhere to treatment, and support others to do the same. In this way, dignity in healthcare is not only a human rights imperative, it is also essential to ending AIDS by 2030.

ICWEA reaffirms its commitment to challenging stigma and discrimination against women and girls living with HIV in Eastern Africa. We commit to work alongside governments, healthcare providers, communities, and partners to sustain gains, stand with communities, and share the facts, ensuring that women living with HIV live dignified lives no one feels “less than” because of their HIV status and that every woman and young woman has access to the prevention choices she needs to live with confidence and dignity.

Together, we can build a future rooted in dignity, inclusion, choice, and zero discrimination.

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