

Diverting discrimination in a digital era: Opportunities and risks of information and communication technologies (ICT) to improve healthcare access among highly stigmatized and criminalised populations affected by HIV

Background

Four decades into the HIV epidemic, this virus remains strikingly stigmatized. Moreover, communities that are disproportionately affected by HIV, such as sex workers, men who have sex with men, transgender people and people who use drugs, are often criminalized. This hostility against people living with and affected by HIV has serious epidemiological consequences because fear of judgement and incarceration deters people from using health facilities. Indeed, meta-analytic evidence has established strong links between stigma and poor health outcomes, reduced access to healthcare and increased HIV prevalence at national and regional levels.

Digital solutions such as mHealth offer unprecedented opportunities to access information, counselling and healthcare remotely, potentially reducing risk of discrimination. But digital approaches to health simultaneously introduce distinctive risks related to data security and confidentiality. This symposium will present perspectives from the global south on how digital solutions can help 'divert discrimination' and improve access to HIV services.

Symposium

Chaired by **Dr Marija Pantelic**, Senior Advisor for Research and Evaluation, International HIV/AIDS Alliance and Associate Fellow, Department of Social Policy and Intervention, University of Oxford

1. **Claudia Nizigiyimana**, Advisor, Réseau National des Jeunes vivant avec le VIH (RNJ+) and Béatrice Léuwe, Project Coordinator, The Swedish Programme for ICT in Developing Regions (SPIDER):
"iREADY: Thinking allowed about growing up, sex and HIV"
2. **Tina Luo**, Executive Director, AIDS Care China:
"An online health consultation and referral platform for Chinese gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men"
3. **David Clark**, Head of HIV Prevention, Treatment and Care Programmes, International HIV/AIDS Alliance:
"Shifting from cruising sites to websites – keeping pace with how stigmatised populations use technology to make health decisions"

Each talk will be 15 minutes long. After all presentations are completed, I will open the floor for 30 minutes of questions and discussion. This will take us to exactly 1 hour and 15 minutes and as you see we have more than enough content to cover during this limited time.