



2024

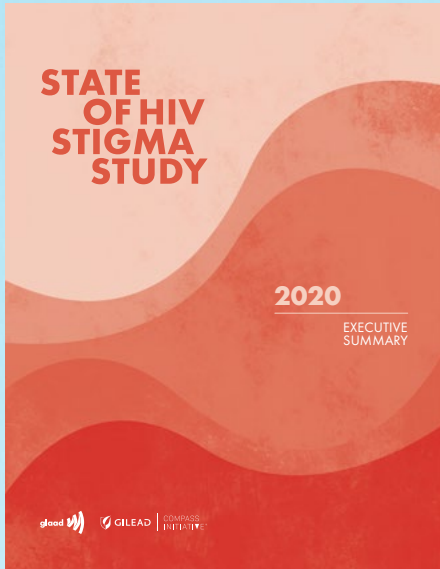
STATE OF HIV STIGMA



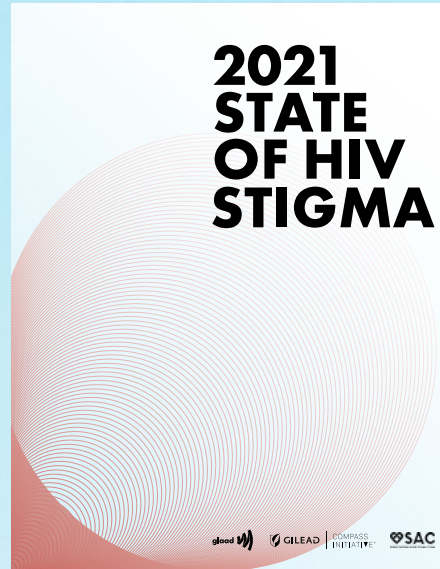
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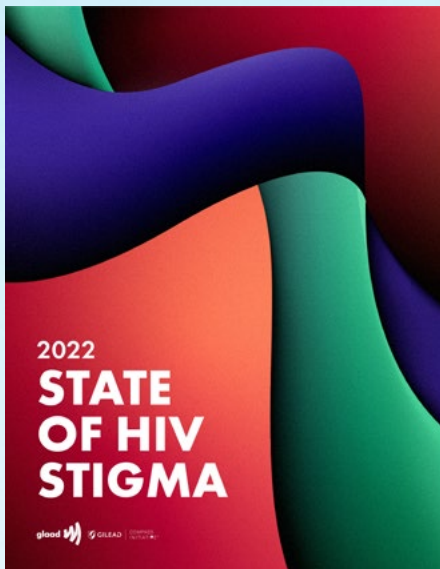
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2020



2021



2022



2023



INTRODUCTION

This marks the fifth year that GLAAD, with Gilead Sciences and the Gilead COMPASS Initiative®, have tracked Americans' knowledge and attitudes around HIV and HIV stigma. Ending stigma and increasing public education about HIV remain urgent, and the keys are found in using media to tell stories of HIV today and of people living with HIV.

Approximately 1.2 million people in the U.S. are living with HIV. According to the CDC, gay and bisexual men account for about two-thirds of new HIV diagnoses in the U.S. each year, with Black and Latine gay and bi men disproportionately impacted. The CDC also estimates that over 14% of transgender women are living with HIV.

Today, PrEP reduces the risk of getting HIV from sex by 99%. And treating HIV can suppress the virus to the point where it is no longer detected, allowing people living with HIV to live long and healthy lives. When HIV is undetected, it is not sexually transmittable. This is the key message of U=U (undetectable = untransmittable) and GLAAD encourages all media and notables to include U=U when speaking about HIV today.

While this year's Stigma Report shows that nearly 90% of Americans feel knowledgeable about HIV, fewer Americans this year report knowing that people living with HIV can live long and healthy lives. This decline is particularly seen in the U.S. South. And alarmingly, this year's State of HIV Stigma Report also showed that Gen Z, the most diverse and out LGBTQ generation in history, continued to be the least knowledgeable about HIV. GLAAD and Gilead Sciences, along with partner organizations, are leading campaigns and programs that break down information barriers on HIV, PrEP, and U=U, especially for younger and underrepresented LGBTQ people.

In the entertainment industry, programs like GLAAD's Equity in Media and Entertainment Initiative (EMEI), now in its third-year cohort of Black queer creatives, bridges gaps in opportunities to create stigma-breaking content. GLAAD's *Studio Responsibility Index* and *Where We Are on TV* studies continue to hold Hollywood accountable for a lack of stories about HIV and diverse LGBTQ people. Our latest TV study counted only one LGBTQ TV character who was portrayed as living with HIV (on Showtime's GLAAD Media Award-winning limited series *Fellow Travelers*). By leaving



stories that serve the public good, and are likely to earn praise from audiences and critics, on the table, Hollywood is missing major opportunities and evading a responsibility to represent their audiences.

In news media, GLAAD has launched two bureaus in the U.S. South that have supercharged the quality and quantity of news stories that combat HIV stigma, with over 500 original articles on topics related to HIV since our work with Gilead Sciences began – from local outlets like the Mississippi Free Press to Good Morning America and CNN – GLAAD has briefed more than 1,000 journalists across newsrooms to ensure articles about HIV are accurate. GLAAD has also engaged the world's most notable talent, including Oprah Winfrey, Beyoncé, JAY-Z and more, to speak out about U=U and HIV, but much more is needed.

Our research shows that seeing stories about HIV increases comfort around engaging with people living with HIV, as well as education. Media shapes how we show up in the world. And how we show up in the world has the power to shift culture, break stigma, and change behaviors. As you read this report, we hope you are moved to share what you have learned and add to your own stories. Ending HIV and HIV stigma should be every generation's lasting achievement.

Sincerely,

Sarah Kate Ellis
President & CEO, GLAAD

FOREWORD

As we reflect on the findings of the 2024 State of HIV Stigma report, it is essential to recognize both the progress we have made and the challenges that lie ahead. At Gilead, our commitment to addressing HIV stigma and advancing health equity is unwavering. Through our work with GLAAD, we strive to ensure that everyone is better informed about HIV. This commitment is not just about improving knowledge; it is about fostering understanding, reducing stigma and creating a more inclusive and supportive society.

The report highlights significant achievements, such as the reduction in the belief that HIV stigma still exists, from 89% in 2020 to 85% in 2024. However, it also underscores areas where our efforts must increase. The stability in general knowledge about HIV across the U.S. and the Southern U.S. is encouraging, but it is concerning that Gen Z continues to be among the least knowledgeable generations about HIV. With only 37% of Gen Z adults feeling knowledgeable about HIV, we must focus on educational initiatives that resonate with younger audiences.

A troubling trend in the report is the decline in the belief that everyone should get tested for HIV, dropping from 77% in 2020 to 67% in 2024. This decline is seen across all regions, signaling a need for renewed advocacy and education efforts. Moreover, the belief that people living with HIV can lead long, healthy lives has also decreased, particularly in the Southern U.S.. These insights remind us that while progress has been made, our work is far from over.

Focusing on Latino/a/e communities and youth is crucial in our fight against HIV stigma. For Latino/a/e communities, tailored outreach and culturally competent education are necessary to address unique challenges and barriers to HIV prevention and treatment. For our youth, innovative and engaging educational programs are vital to increase knowledge and foster a new generation free from stigma.

At Gilead, our commitment extends beyond these findings. We are dedicated to leveraging our resources and expertise to create impactful change. This means supporting community-driven solutions, advocating for policy changes, and ensuring that everyone, regardless of background, has access to accurate information and compassionate care.

The 2024 State of HIV Stigma report serves as a call to action. It challenges us to reflect on our progress and recommit to the



work ahead. By focusing on education, representation and community engagement, we can continue to make strides toward a world free from HIV stigma. Together, we can ensure that all individuals, especially the most vulnerable, are informed, supported and empowered.

Sincerely,

Carmen Villar

*Vice President, ESG & Corporate Citizenship,
Public Affairs, Gilead Sciences*

KEY FINDINGS

GLAAD's 2024 State of HIV Stigma report - now in its fifth year - tracks progress against HIV stigma, transmission and prevention of HIV, as well as understanding attitudes, knowledge, and comfortability of people living with HIV in the United States. The focus of the report this

year is a five year look back at how key pillars have changed over time, to understand progress that has been made towards eradicating HIV Stigma, and work that still needs to be done. There is a focus this year on trends in the Total U.S., and on the Southern U.S. as well.

Highlights in the report:

- There has been a significant decrease in the belief that stigma around HIV still exists over 5 years, from **89%** in 2020 to **85%** in 2024.
- Knowledge of HIV is mostly stable in the U.S. and in the Southern U.S. over 5 years, with nearly **90%** of Americans knowing at least a little about HIV, and half feeling knowledgeable.
- Gen Z continues to be among the least knowledgeable generations about HIV. Only **37%** of Gen Z adults are knowledgeable about HIV, which is on par with five years ago.
- Our *Where We Are on TV* study shows that only one LGBTQ character living with HIV was portrayed in primetime scripted television during the most recent season, and is not expected to return. There has also been a significant decrease year over year in Americans seeing people living with HIV in TV shows and/or movies, from **39%** in 2023 to **35%** in 2024.
- **GLAAD and Gilead's work is not done, as there are some metrics where we've seen declines over five years:**
 - We've seen a significant decrease in the belief that everyone should get tested for HIV, from **77%** in 2020 to **67%** in 2024. This decline is seen in all regions of the country.
 - And we've seen a significant decrease in the belief that people living with HIV can live long, healthy lives, from **90%** in 2020 to **85%** in 2024. The Southern U.S. is the only region to see a significant decline here as well.
- Seeing stories of people living with HIV drives up comfortability interacting with people living with HIV in various scenarios in life by up to **+15%**.

SOUTHERN SPOTLIGHT

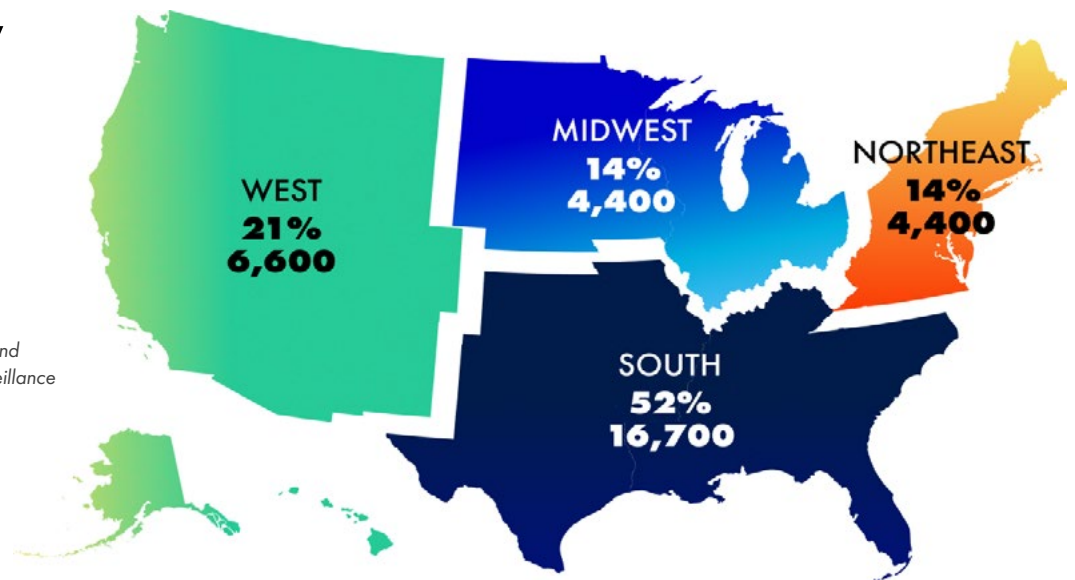
In 2021, the South accounted for more than half (52%) of new HIV diagnoses. In partnership with the Gilead COMPASS Initiative and in response to the Southern HIV epidemic, GLAAD and Gilead have been partners since 2019 in this important work to reduce HIV stigma, and

understand comfortability, media exposure, and trends related to HIV stigma. In our fifth year of the State of HIV Stigma report we look at not only the trends in the United States as a whole, but in the Southern U.S.. Below are observed changes in the data in the Southern U.S.

Estimated HIV diagnoses in the US by region, 2021

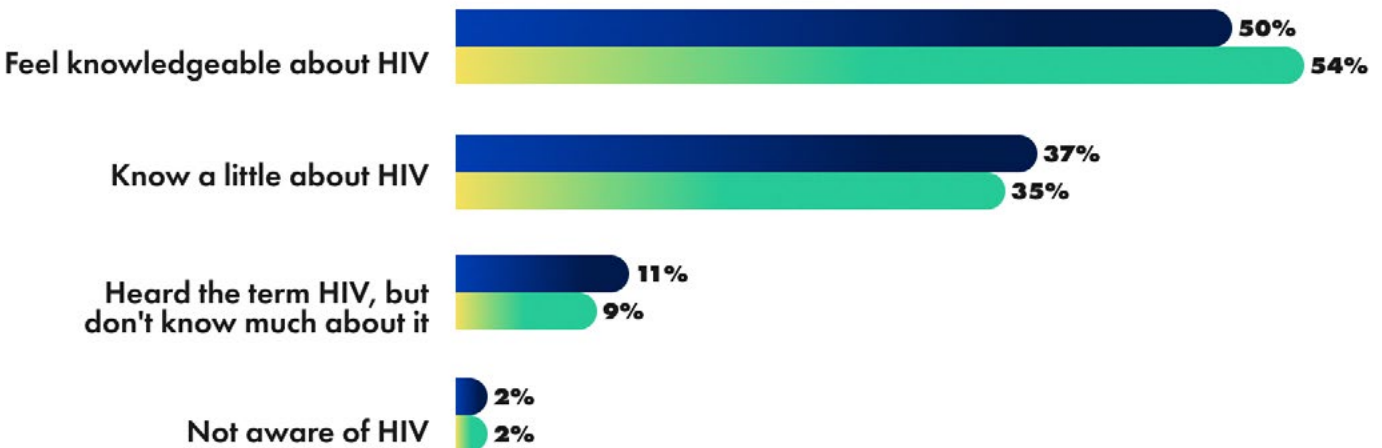
Among people aged 13 and older

Source: CDC; Estimated HIV incidence and prevalence in the US 2017–2021. HIV Surveillance Supplemental Report 2023



Knowledge of HIV is stable in the Southern U.S.

● 2020 ● 2024 % who agree in the Southern US



Comfortability in the South is stable

Comfortability interacting with a doctor, dentist, or medical professional living with HIV has increased.

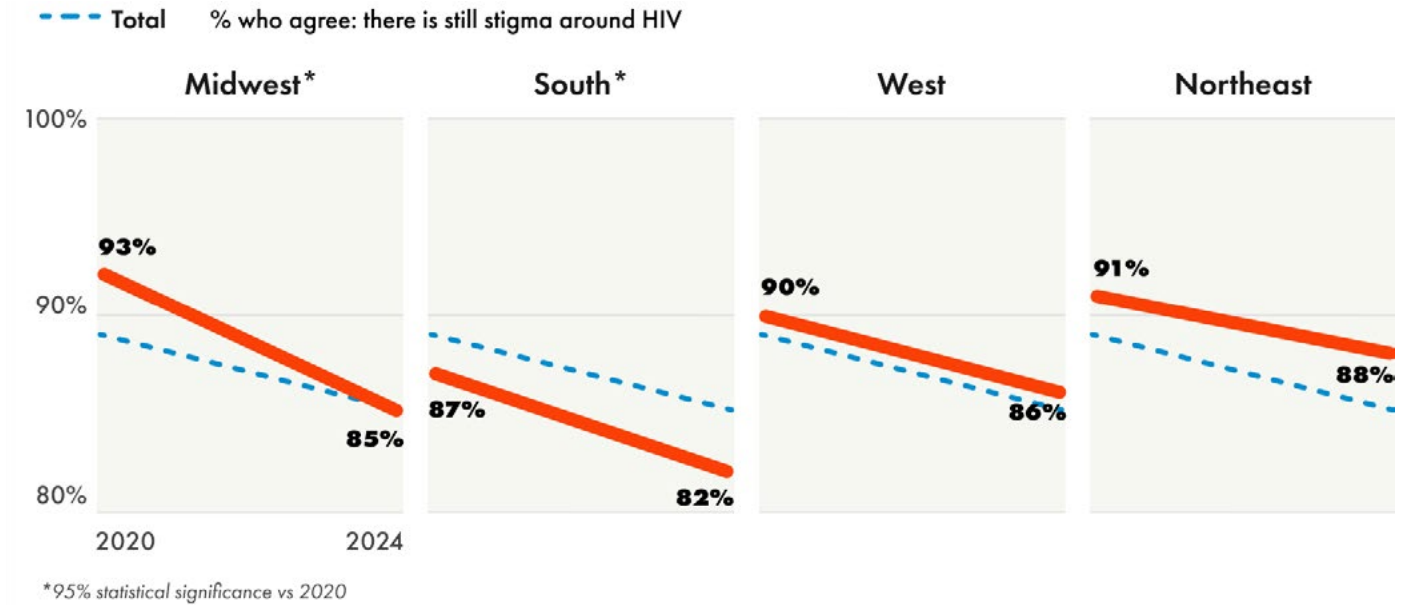
● 2020 ● 2024 5-year trend in comfortability interacting with people living with HIV in these scenarios among adults in the South



*95% statistical significance vs 2020

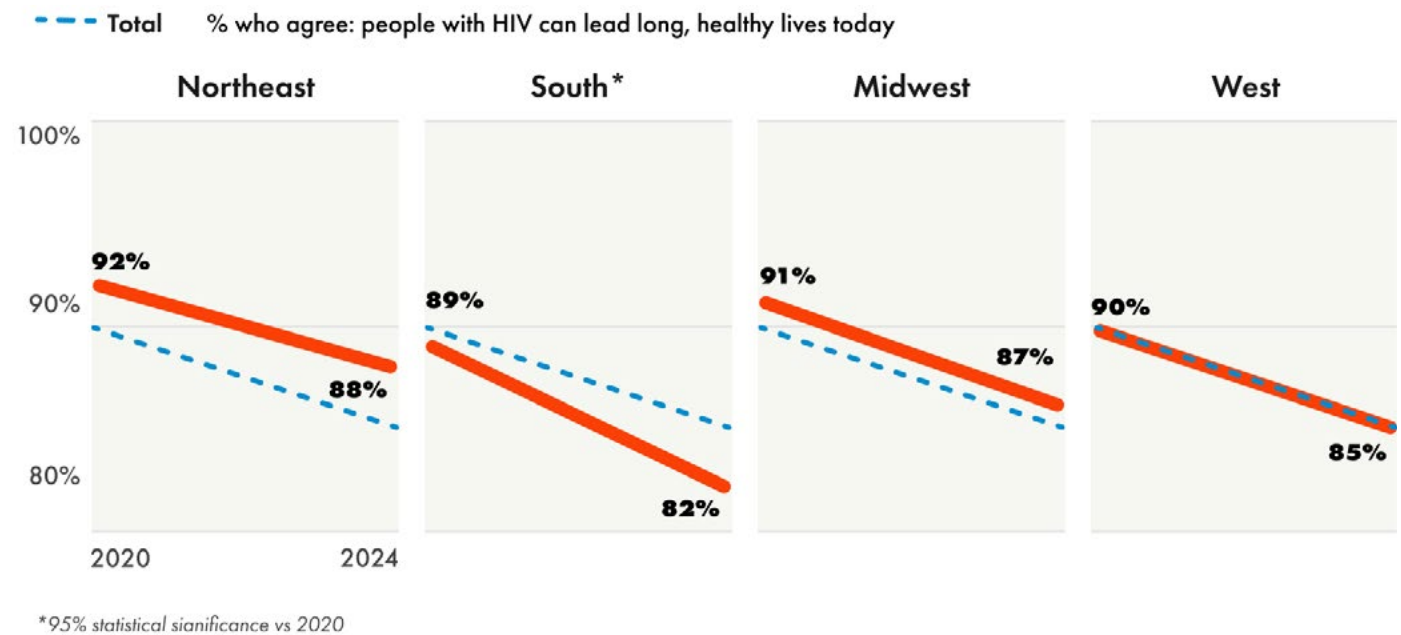
Decreases seen in the belief that stigma around HIV still exists in the South and the Midwest

There has been a significant decline in the belief that stigma around HIV still exists over five years in the Southern U.S., from 87% in 2020 to 82% in 2024. The South and Midwest are the only two regions to see a statistically significant decline.



People living with HIV can and do lead long, healthy lives

There has been a significant decrease in Americans in the Southern U.S. agreeing that people living with HIV can lead long, healthy lives today, from 89% in 2020 to 82% in 2024.



THE LOSS OF STORIES ABOUT HIV: A NEW SILENCE

We know that seeing stories in media that accurately and fairly represent the LGBTQ community is key to breaking barriers and improving comfortability with LGBTQ people. For people living with HIV, consistent representation in entertainment media is crucial to eradicating HIV stigma and bridging generational knowledge gaps. And with only one LGBTQ character depicted as living with HIV in the last TV season according to GLAAD's *Where We Are on TV* study — who is not expected to return — Hollywood is falling short when it comes to reflecting real stories of people living with HIV.

Correcting the record and holding media accountable to ensure stories of people impacted by HIV are told in mainstream media is the basis of GLAAD's founding in 1985 amid the throws of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, when defamation and misinformation ran rampant about the epidemic. Today, with this study, GLAAD continues to deliver on its core mission and vision by calling into focus that comfortability with people living with HIV cannot be accomplished without key visibility in media to drive acceptance.

There's perhaps no image more resonant from the earliest days of the HIV/AIDS crisis than the political poster *Silence*

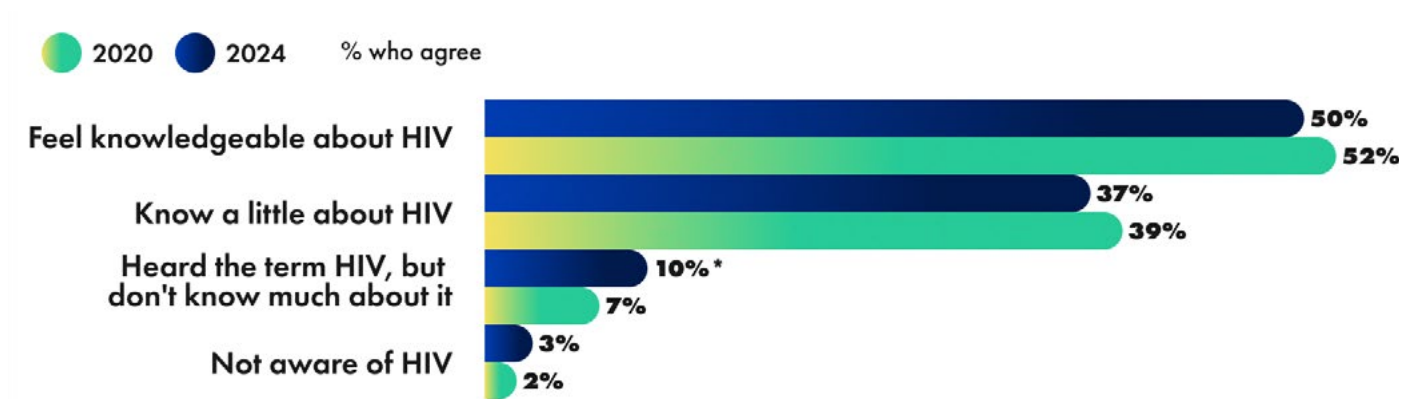
= *Death*, which features that enduring phrase alongside the image of a fuchsia triangle. The poster came out of the *Silence = Death* collective and predated the formation of the activist group ACT UP¹. Its purpose was to provoke conversation and inquiry around HIV/AIDS where none existed previously. "The tagline was crafted to be provocative and alarming and to stimulate a political response in a setting that was not necessarily political," Avram Finkelstein, founder of the collective and one of six co-creators of the poster, wrote in 2017. "It was the voice of the insider and, by surface appearances, was declarative. But it was meant to stimulate curiosity, and questions. In that regard it was a Trojan horse."

"*Silence = Death*" is as relevant today as it was in 1987. While this year's *State of HIV Stigma Report* reflected a slight uptick in Americans who say they've heard of HIV but don't know much about it — 1 in 10 — GLAAD found that only half of Americans say they feel knowledgeable about HIV, 40 years since the first cases of what later became known as AIDS were officially reported. And, as compared to 2020, more people self-report being uncomfortable interacting with a co-worker or neighbor who was living with HIV.

Knowing the power of entertainment media, the **loss of stories about HIV can indicate a dangerous backslide at a time when information about the virus is needed most.**

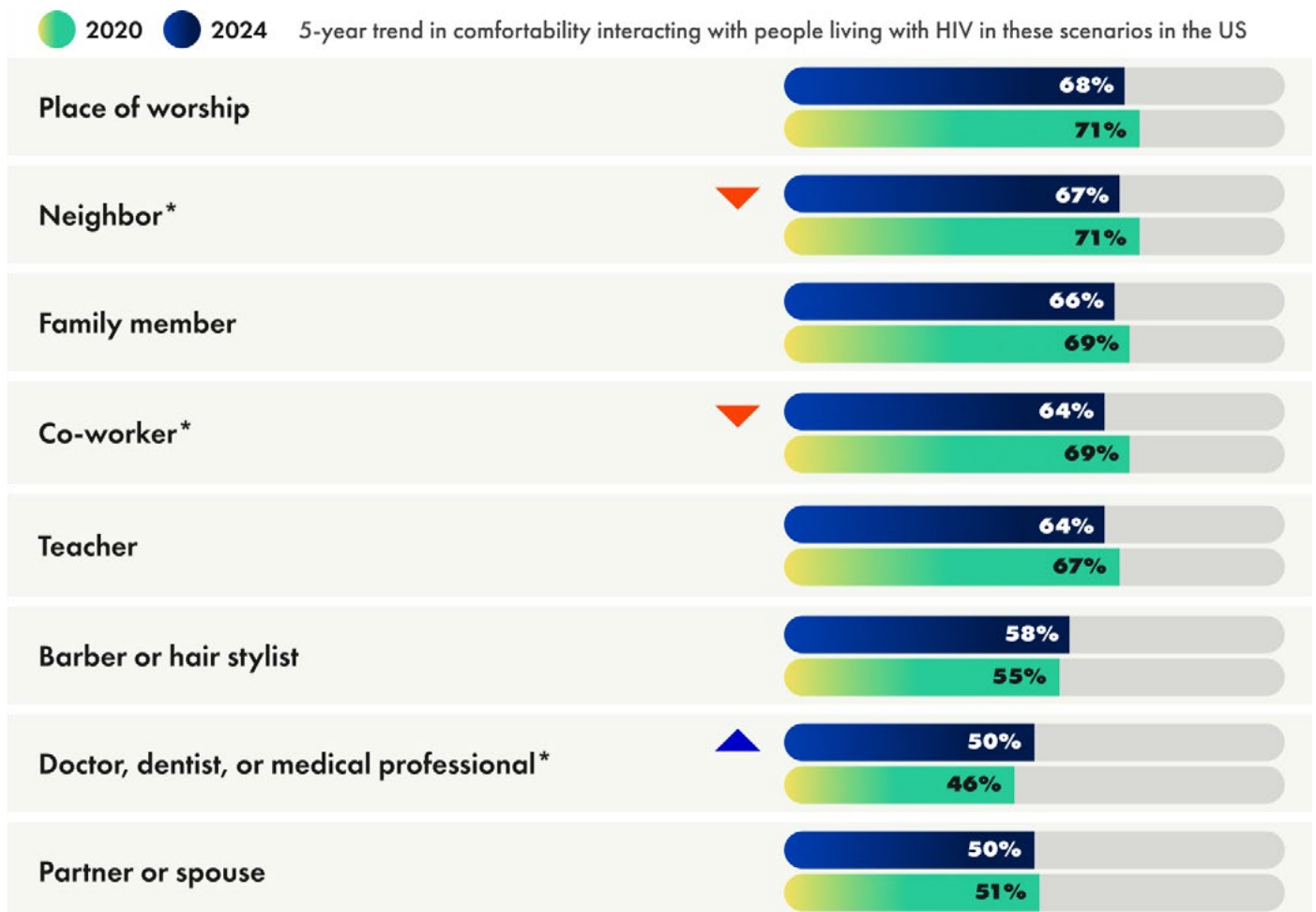
Knowledge about HIV in the U.S. is mostly stable

Nearly 90% of Americans know at least a little about HIV, stable over five years. However, we have seen a significant increase in the percent of Americans say they have heard the term HIV don't know much about it.



Decreases in comfortability are seen in a couple scenarios

However, there is more comfort this year compared to five years ago interacting with a doctor, dentist or medical professional living with HIV.



*95% statistical significance

Just as more Americans report feeling less comfortable around people living with HIV (PLWHIV) in those two scenarios, media representations of PLWHIV have fallen: in the 2023-24 television season, GLAAD counted only one LGBTQ character living with HIV on broadcast, cable, or streaming scripted primetime programming, down from 8 in the year prior.

When the original “Silence = Death” poster debuted, it was wheat-pasted into a world where president Ronald Reagan barely said the name of the virus and prominent conservatives, such as William F. Buckley, argued that people living with HIV should be tattooed to show their status. The poster was meant to inspire action to combat overwhelming stigma.

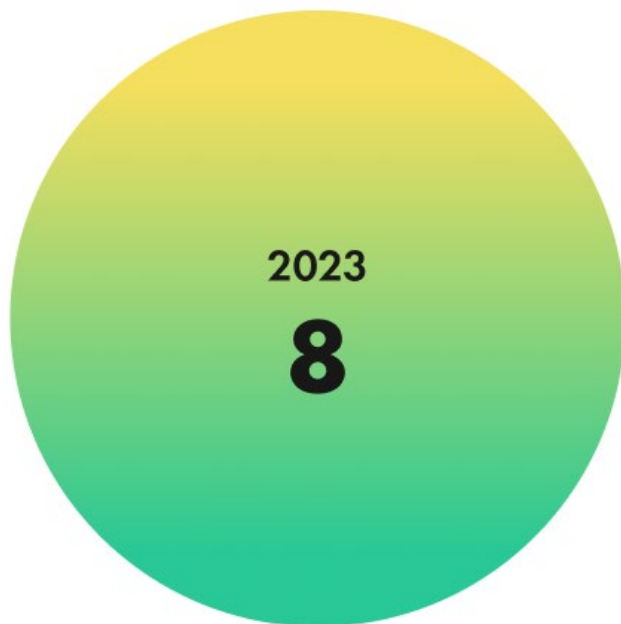
While the circumstances of today may be different, the lesson may be the same. We know that lack of information about HIV leads to a decrease in comfortability around people living with HIV. Data also proves the opposite to be

true: among non-LGBTQ Americans surveyed by GLAAD, people who had been introduced to media about the virus notably increased comfortability around people with HIV.

While the “Silence = Death” imagery spoke to a political silence, this might be an opportunity to ask ourselves about the consequences of a cultural silence. What does it mean that there are fewer stories about people living with HIV available to the general public? Mass media is a powerful tool; a recent study showed that portrayals of people living with HIV can help reduce stigma, while also confirming that negative portrayals of people living with HIV can also have a reversed effect on attitudes towards them, as well².

Knowing the power of entertainment media, the loss of stories about HIV can indicate a dangerous backslide at a time when information about the virus is needed most. How do we bring back curiosity? Curiosity does not come about in a vacuum, it must be piqued. We must find innovative ways to increase curiosity / learning about people living with HIV again.

GLAAD’s *Where We Are on TV* study finds only one LGBTQ character living with HIV this year, and not expected to return



Jonathan Bailey
as Tim Laughlin on
Fellow Travelers



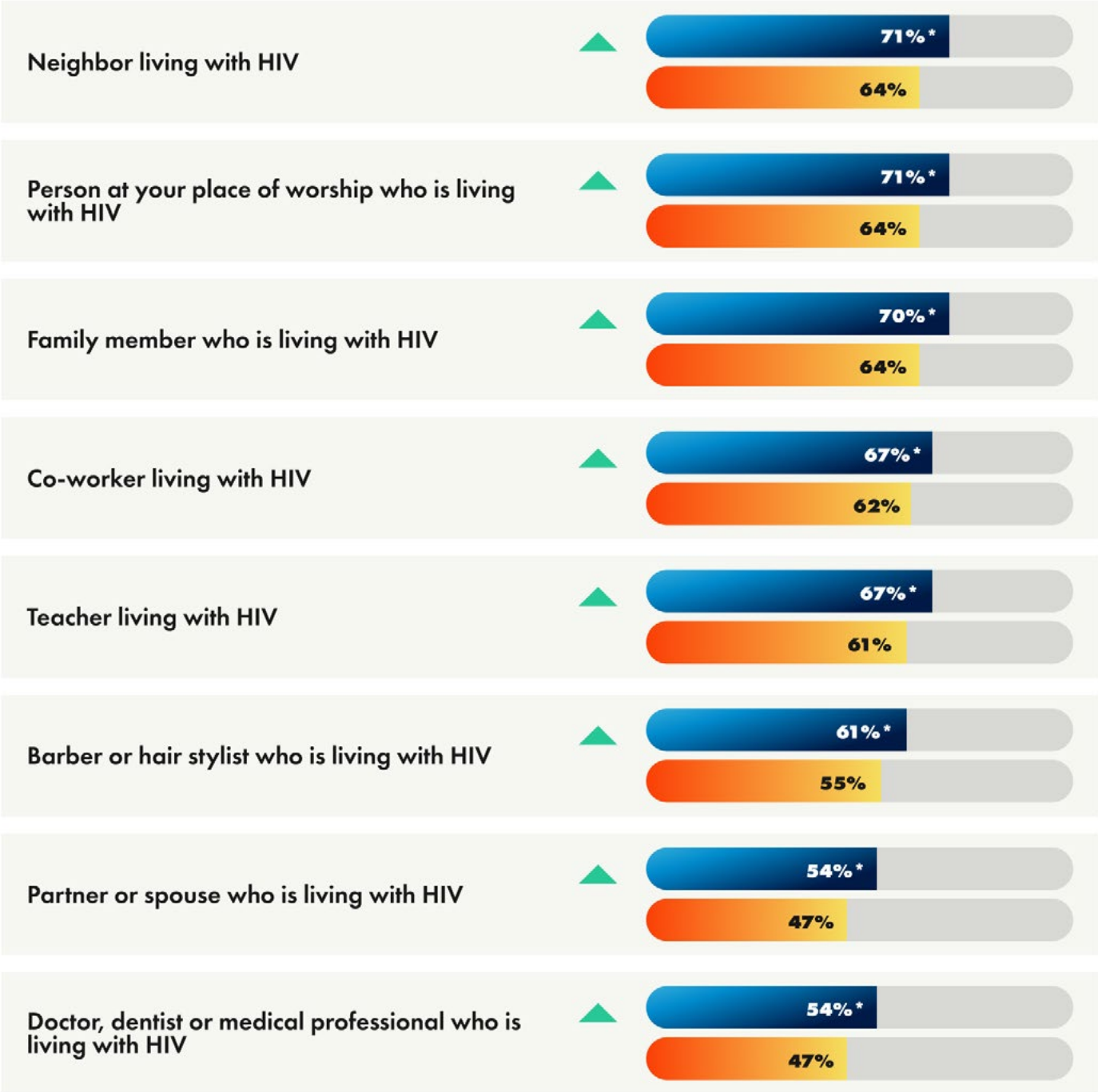
Source: GLAAD’s *Where We Are on TV* Study, 2023-24.

Seeing stories of people living with HIV in media drives comfortability

Media exposure is critical to comfortability with people living with HIV. When Americans see people living with HIV in the media, comfortability grows by up to +15%.

● Have seen stories of people living with HIV
 ● Have not seen stories of people living with HIV

% comfortable based on media exposure



*95% statistical significance

THE POWER OF AN HIV STORY:

PEDRO ZAMORA AND THE REAL WORLD

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the airing of *Real World San Francisco* on MTV, which featured Pedro Zamora, who was the first reality TV personality to publicly share their HIV status. By the time the show debuted, he had already told his story to many people nationwide as a public speaker in small groups. Zamora understood the power of story and of mass media to influence public opinion.

“I can get up and tell my story about not feeling well or having fun, about getting sick or going out dancing, but people can’t really see it,” Zamora said in an [interview](#)³ with *POZ* in 1994. “I thought being on this series would be a great way to show how a young person actually deals with HIV and AIDS.”

When Zamora died only hours after the *Real World* season finale aired in November 1994, he was 1 of just under 50,000 people living with HIV who passed that year⁴. For those Americans who knew no one who was living openly with AIDS, Zamora was the person they knew. They had watched him, in their living rooms, parasail in Mexico and have a commitment ceremony — the first between a same-sex couple in TV history — to his partner, Sean Sasser.

Not only did *Real World* viewers get a sense of Zamora’s life with HIV, they also saw firsthand the consequences of HIV stigma and misinformation. While living in the house, Zamora was able to educate the cast about AIDS, even becoming close with one cast member, Rachel Campos-Duffy, who initially expressed hesitation to live with someone who was HIV positive. “He was very well-aware of what he wanted to accomplish on the show,” Campos-Duffy later told BuzzFeed. “He also understood his power on the show in terms of how important this story was going to be, how groundbreaking it was.”⁵

Zamora’s story stood as a counter testament to the usual depictions of those living with HIV and stands, once again, three decades later, as a model for the power of a well-told story to change public sentiment and deliver important information. Data from GLAAD indicates that long-held myths and misgivings about people living with HIV are on

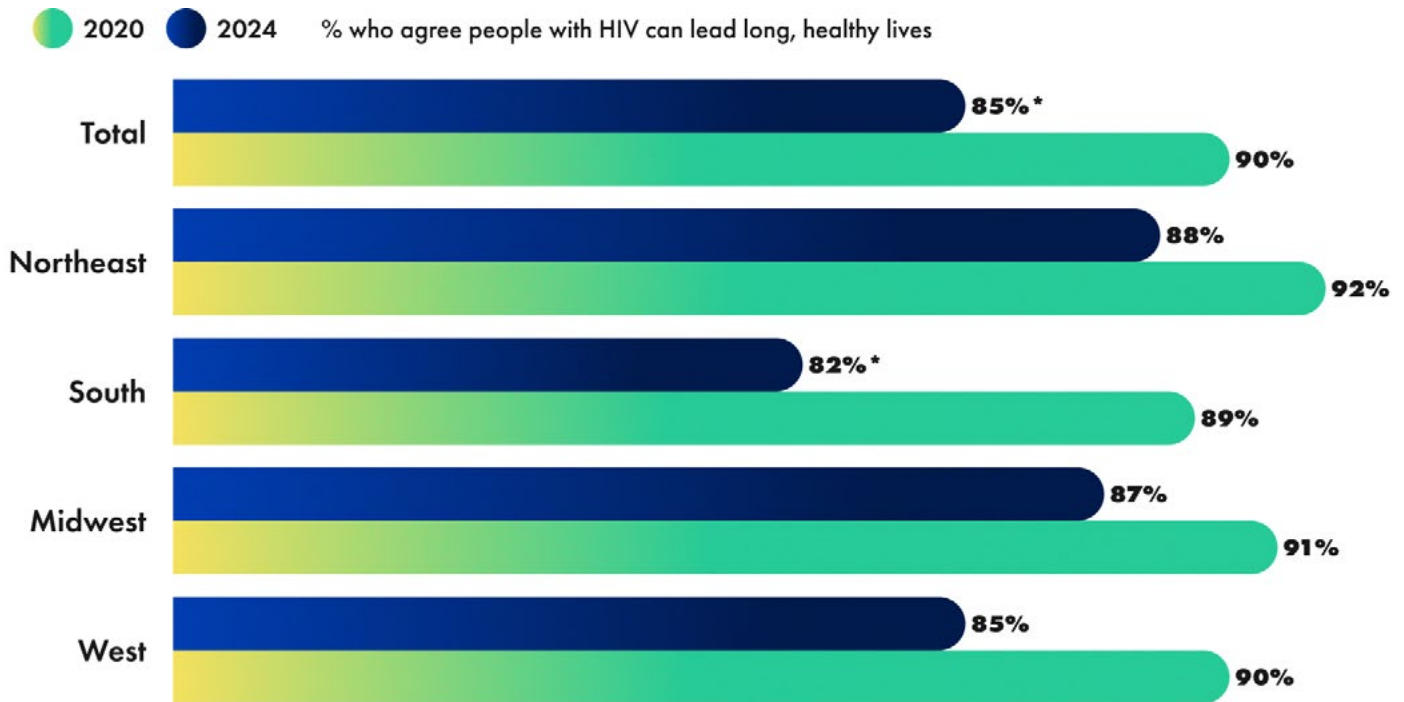
the rise again: across the board, fewer Americans today believe that people living with HIV can lead long, healthy lives with proper access to treatment, compared to 2020. The only region of the country that saw significant declines in this belief came among respondents in the Southern United States. Similarly, GLAAD recorded a steep decline in all regions of the U.S. in the belief that everyone should get tested for HIV, despite the CDC recommending that all people between the ages of 13 and 64 know their status.

Zamora’s unscripted presentation of a life with HIV preceded many fictional accounts that would follow. Since 1994, many series have had storylines about people living with the virus, including *How to Get Away with Murder*, *Pose* and *Looking*. Despite the multiple TV shows in the past few decades that have pulled back the curtain on life with HIV, in the year 2023-24 television season, only one character on a scripted broadcast, cable or streaming show in the United States was HIV positive: Tim, portrayed by Jonathan Bailey, one-half of the series’ main couple. Given that it’s a limited series, *Fellow Travelers* will not be returning, potentially leading to a television landscape that will not feature any people living with HIV.

In a country with 1.2 million people living with HIV, a media landscape that does not reflect what it means to live with the virus is a disservice to a large number of Americans. As data captured by GLAAD shows, exposure to depictions of people living with HIV (PLWHIV) as real, 3-D human beings makes people more welcoming to PLWHIV in their communities.

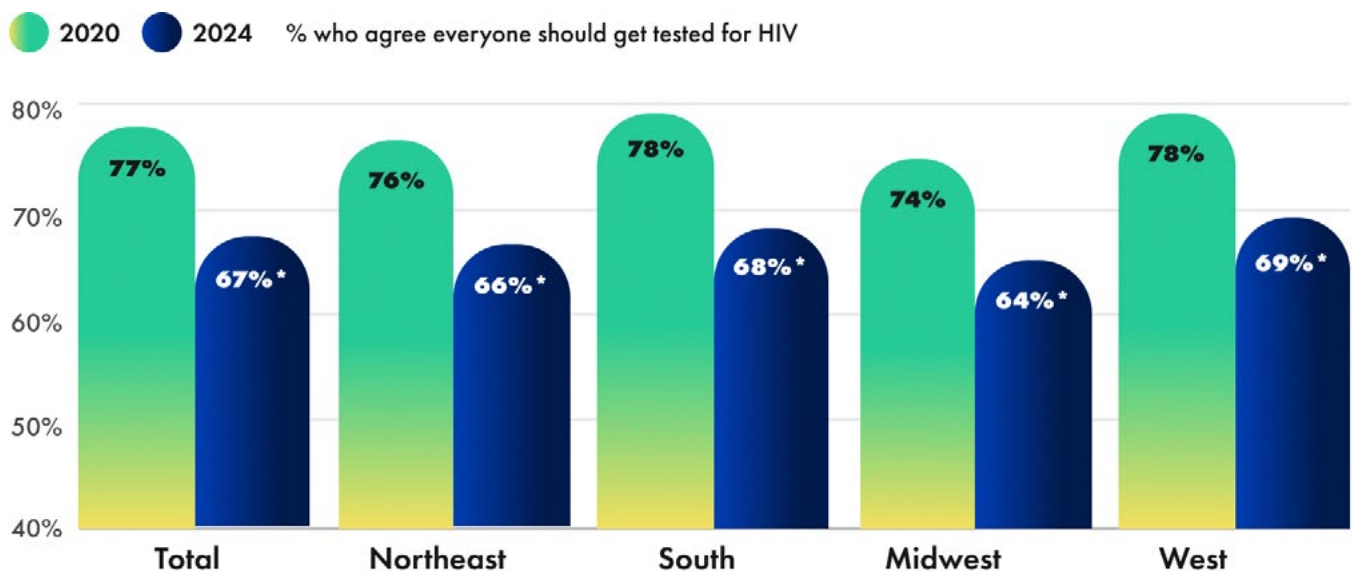
People living with HIV can and do lead long, healthy lives

Yet, significantly fewer Americans agree with this statement in 2024, compared to 2020. We need to see more stories of people living with HIV thriving, across all forms of media.



*95% statistical significance

The CDC recommends that everyone between the ages of 13 and 64 get tested for HIV at least once



*95% statistical significance

HIV STIGMA SPOTLIGHT:

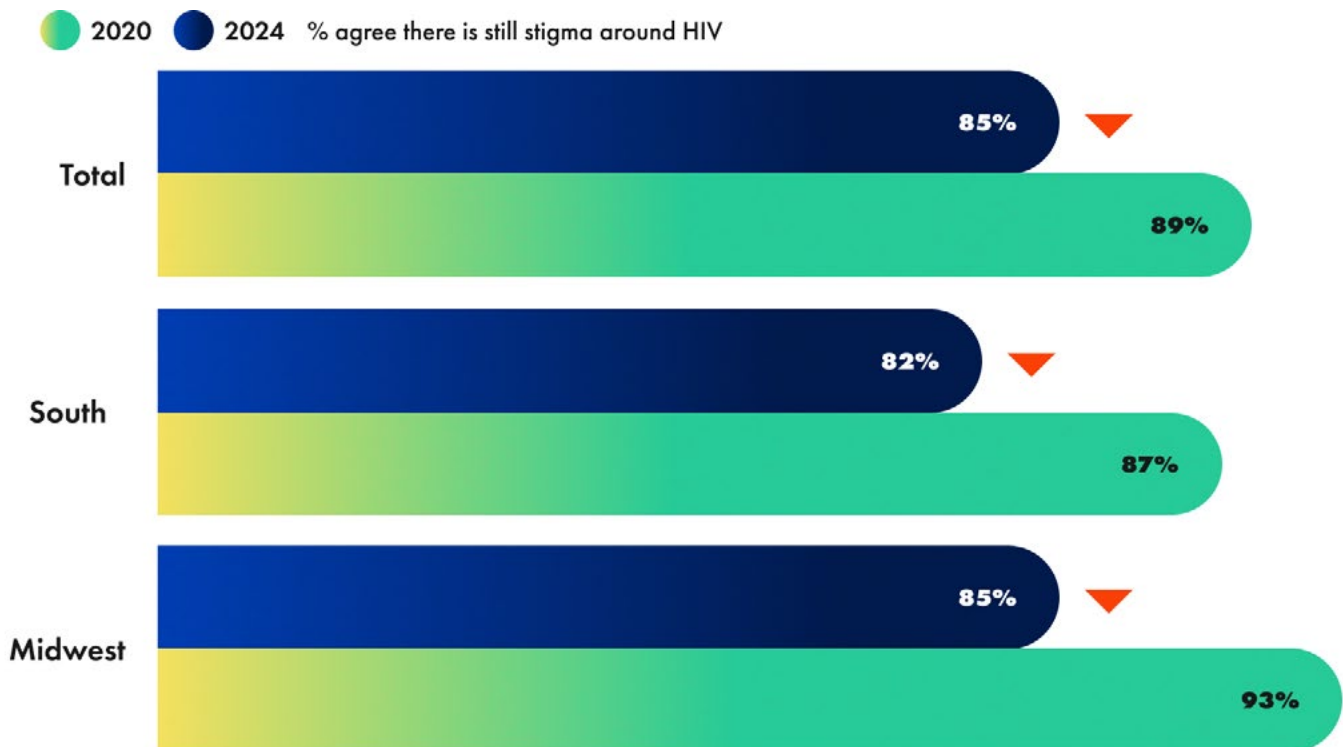
"SIGNIFICANTLY EVOLVED" IN A WORLD OF "HIV INVISIBILITY"

Whether it be interpersonal or structural, HIV stigma continues to affect people living with HIV, and with harmful consequences. Stigma stops people from getting tested and knowing their status, blocks people living with HIV from accessing treatment and continues to influence unjust laws that are on the books in multiple states. Despite stigma against the virus continuing to exist, data captured by GLAAD shows that there

has been a significant decrease over five years in Americans believing that stigma continues to be a problem for people living with HIV (PLWHIV).

Overall, in 2024 85% of Americans believe there is still a stigma around HIV, which is down significantly from when GLAAD started asking this question in 2020 (89%). Regionally, there have been noticeable

Significant decreases in the belief that stigma around HIV still exists







decreases seen in the Midwest and South, as well as among non-LGBTQ Americans and white Americans. Not only does stigma still exist for people with HIV, some people who spoke to GLAAD said that it plays a bigger role in life with HIV than people realize. **“Stigma is the biggest issue, the biggest factor for people living with HIV, especially in the South,”** said Arianna Lint, a trans woman living with HIV and the CEO of Arianna’s Center, an organization serving trans people living in Florida.

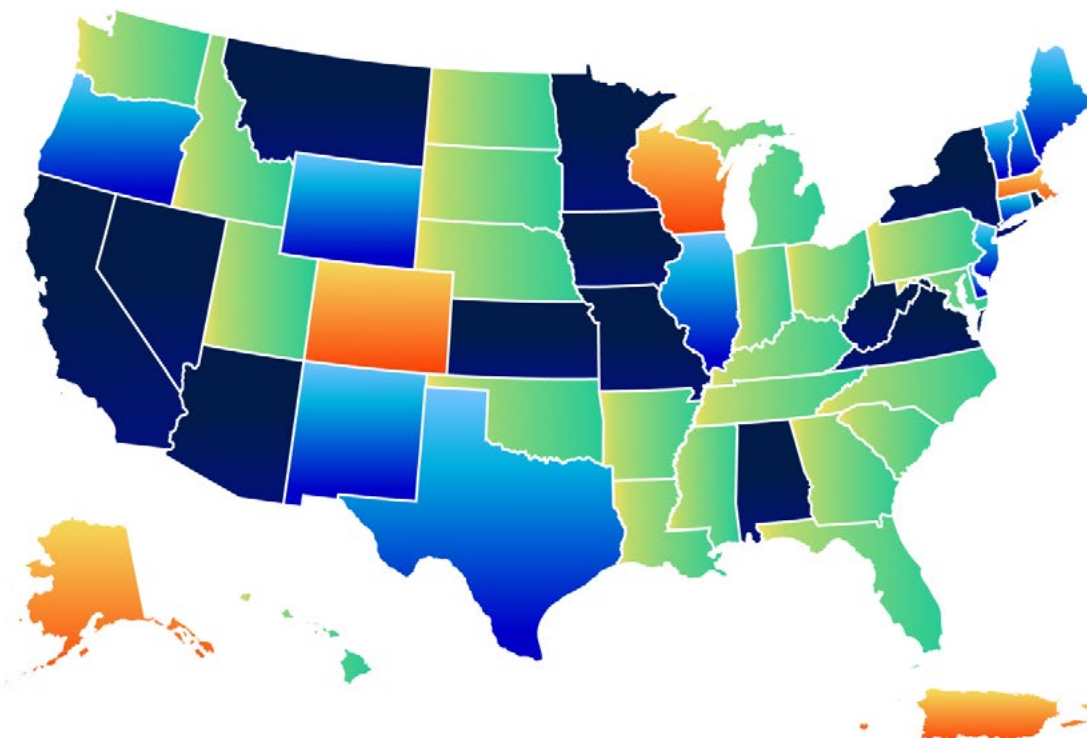
That the percentage of people who don’t recognize HIV stigma is real speaks to less familiarity with HIV overall. That might be because conversations, even casual ones, about HIV happen far less in a world with better HIV treatment and prevention. This can give the impression that the HIV/AIDS epidemic is over. **“What’s starting to be prevalent now is HIV invisibility,”** says Jeremiah Johnson, who is living with HIV and is the executive director of the nonprofit organization PrEP4All. “In some of the most privileged

communities, HIV is not as intense and therefore, to them, it no longer exists and is no longer focused on. It’s challenging if you are part of a community that doesn’t have that as your situation and for whom we still need to be doing important awareness raising and policy work.”

Many people might remember very blatant and obvious forms of stigma, such as people living with HIV being shunned by family or being asked to use different cutlery and plates from their HIV-negative family. That kind of discrimination still happens, according to Marnina Miller, the co-executive director of the Well Project, an organization dedicated to helping women and girls living with HIV. She said that she still hears from people through the Well Project that people still face discrimination from family members, including having to have a different set of linens at home. “HIV stigma has significantly evolved, but you still have fear around casual contact for people living with HIV,” she said.

HIV and STD Criminalization Laws 2023

-  Criminalize or control actions through HIV-specific statutes and regulations (n=21)
-  Criminalize or control actions through STD/communicable infectious diseases specific statutes (n=13)
-  Sentence enhancement statutes (n=5)
-  None/General criminal statutes (n=13)



Source: CDC

But, as media depictions and conversations around HIV have fallen, there is much less mass media insight into how an HIV diagnosis affects people's lives, including in unseen or underreported ways.

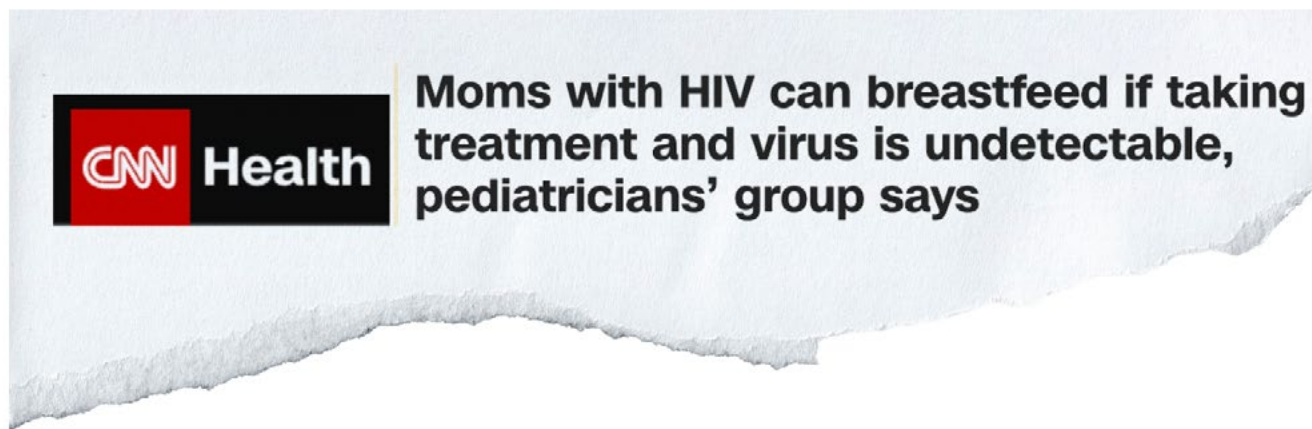
Keiva Lei Cadena, who is the Well Project's other co-executive director, and Miller both emphasized that living with HIV means that their bodies are either not allowed certain places or considered dangerous depending on where they travel. The HIV stigma that has leaked into America's legal infrastructure means that Cadena has to be careful when traveling for work, as just doing her work as the head of an organization puts her at risk.

"I need to know where I'm safe and where I'm not safe," she said. "And if not, how are we protecting ourselves?"

in prison because they were having sex while living with HIV. "If we stop talking about stigma in this kind of way, those experiences get forgotten, and that's dangerous."

How people with HIV experience stigma also comes down to their other identities, as well. Miller specifically mentioned how it was only this year that HIV-positive mothers were told that they could breastfeed their children safely. Prior to this change, many mothers living with HIV were made to feel shame and stigma about their status.⁸

And while systemic stigma is still harrowing, interpersonal stigma still makes navigating everyday events thorny. Cases of interpersonal stigma still weigh heavily on people with HIV, often causing stress around issues of disclosure. People living with HIV often have to think heavily about who they are comfortable disclosing



Miller added that there are still countries where she is not allowed to travel. Some countries, such as Yemen, the United Arab Emirates and Russia have restrictions on travel for people with HIV, depending on how long a person is planning to visit the country⁶.

When stigma is systemic, it becomes less visible or obvious; but it weighs on people with HIV all the same. Currently, 34 states have laws that criminalize HIV exposure, according to the CDC⁷.

"There's no other virus that can be criminalized the way that HIV is, and it still happens in many of our states with very dangerous laws," Cadena said. "And we still have people that are still

their status to, according to Daniel Driffin, Dr.P.H., a project manager at the HIV Vaccine Trials Network. "Disclosure is still an issue," he said. "Each time is a new time. I have been out for numerous years, and still it's the process of thinking, "Do I have the energy to go through this again and again?"

WHAT MEDIA CAN LEARN FROM THE HIV BOOK RENAISSANCE

Just as Ted Kerr was about to publish his book, *We Are Having This Conversation Now* with his co-writer Alexandra Juhasz in 2022, he realized that many authors happened to be publishing work about HIV. Kerr had been keeping track of films and TV about AIDS for at least a decade prior to the publication of this book, which is about cultural production around the epidemic. Beginning 2008, Kerr and Juhasz noticed an uptick in stories about HIV being told, a period they call “AIDS Crisis Revisitation.” They call that era, between the advent of effective HIV medication and the late 2000s “The Second Silence,” a moment when stories about AIDS reached a nadir.

After he realized that many other books were wrestling with AIDS, as well, he sought the help of friends and colleagues to compile a list of books about AIDS written since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. In just those four years, [the list](#) so far has acknowledged at least 75 books, representing a range of academic fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and from a range of presses, including mainstream and independent presses and self-published work. “It shows me that people are still invested and have a compulsion to create AIDS media,” Kerr said. “And that we need it.”

The list of books stands in opposition to other media, such as television, in which the number of characters living with HIV has dwindled in comparison to other recent years. In some, HIV-positive people are front and center, while in others, they are supporting characters. Some examine the crisis, or aspects of the crisis, from an academic lens or through a poetic lens. After compiling the list, Kerr created an event that brought together both people who filled out the list as well as people who appeared on it to have a conversation. “I think HIV response is best when we are working together, when we are working across disciplines, and when we are aware of other people doing work,” he said. “Even if we don’t agree with it or even if we don’t understand it, we build on each other’s strengths.”

Two themes emerge from the list. First, people looking to nuance history around AIDS with stories that focus on people who might be left out of early representations, including

people of color, women, people who use drugs, Indigenous peoples. This shows that we can stand to augment ideas about who is affected by HIV. “For people living with HIV, it is every day, in every second, every minute,” Kerr said. “For people who are on PrEP, it is an everyday experience, for those of us who are in the movement, we’re thinking about it every day.”

He added, “It doesn’t necessarily need to be the main character. It doesn’t need to be the main plot line. I think it can be a meaningful thread. You get more bang for your buck when you understand that it is part of the fabric of our lives.”

The second was that, influenced by COVID-19, people had a greater desire to put HIV into context alongside other illnesses and epidemics. “Misinformation and disinformation is rampant when it comes to AIDS. This results in people not getting tested, not trusting the effectiveness of their life saving medication,” he said.

"Responsible media helps pushback against lies, stigma and ignorance. It normalizes the complexity and beauty of LGBTQIA existence, including the role HIV plays in our lives."

GLAAD’s work with Gilead Sciences used our *Where We Are on TV* study to call on networks and streamers to introduce three (3) new characters living with HIV each year on broadcast, cable, and streaming primetime scripted programming. While the challenge was met last year with eight characters living with HIV, all of those characters were on limited or canceled series and none returned. In the 2023-24 *Where We Are on TV* study all networks and studios failed this challenge, as only one new LGBTQ character was introduced living with HIV. And, that character is also featured on a limited series, and is not set to return to screen next year.

MEDIA CASE STUDY:

HOW MISINFORMATION PAINTS HIV AS A "BOGEYMAN"

Everyone knows the mythology of the vampire: they are villainous, mysterious blood-sucking fiends. While many people know a lot about vampires, fewer know about "vampire facials," the colloquialism for a platelet-rich plasma facial, in which platelets are taken from your own blood and, using microneedles, injected back into your face⁹. The procedure, which gained popularity after Kim Kardashian photographed herself post-facial and posted it to Instagram, briefly became the subject of intense scrutiny after a spa in New Mexico without proper licensure performed the procedure and exposed several people to HIV.

Some of the earliest headlines about the incident were clear examples of stigmatizing or fear mongering surrounding HIV, something that is made worse when there is even less education about HIV. For instance, headlines from NBC¹⁰, CBS¹¹ and Business Insider¹² all linked the acquisition of HIV to the facial itself, despite the fact that, when done properly, vampire facials are not known to be a risk for HIV transmission.

"A lot of outlets bungled the story and went with the most salacious angle possible to get people panicked," said Juan Michael Porter II, who is living with HIV and is a senior editor at TheBody, an HIV/AIDS news outlet. "The right thing to do is to lead with, 'If you have concerns about this, it is rare and if you want to make sure your clinic is up to date and handling basic safety protocols, here's who to contact.'"

News of the cases first broke in summer 2023, when a New Mexico beauty spa named VIP Spa was found to be at the center of a number of HIV transmissions, each including people who had very few other risk factors for HIV transmission. In total, four people who received services from the spa and one person who was a sexual partner of a patron ended up being diagnosed as living with HIV¹³.

The story was certainly eye-catching, and headlines about the story emphasized the link between the procedure and the subsequent diagnoses, rather than human malpractice.

In fact, the spa's owner was found to be operating without a license and pled guilty to such a charge¹⁴. Despite negligence being at the center of the issue, the headlines framing a link between the facial and HIV reinforce the idea that people living with HIV are vectors of disease and continue to use the virus as a potential "bogeyman" waiting in the wings.

Such a framing is part of a long history of framing people living with HIV as infectious or linking HIV to certain behaviors or practices. One of the earliest examples is Gaetan Dugas, the Quebecois flight attendant who was villainized as the "Typhoid Mary"¹⁵ of the AIDS epidemic, bringing the virus stateside. This is an example of a story framing that has stayed with us since early in the epidemic.

"This reporting puts a target on the backs of people living with HIV and makes it a lot easier for people to say, 'Ew,'" he said. "This framing emboldens people to lean into their worst fears about HIV without thinking about how it will affect people living with the virus."

At a major HIV medical conference in 2024, an epidemiologist with the CDC's Division of HIV Prevention said that this is not a story about a cluster of HIV transmissions, but instead one about malpractice. "It is a story about adequate licensing," she said¹⁶. "That is the overarching theme ... things like this don't typically happen."

Stories like this present several opportunities for journalists. Stories about the spread of HIV present opportunities to include correct, scientifically-backed information about how HIV is spread, as well as narratives that center people living with HIV, including the reality that it is now possible to live a long and healthy life with the virus. You can also empower people with information: just as with finding a doctor or any dentist, people can research the license of any aesthetician or person who is doing a procedure on you, check to make sure their license is still up to date and see if there have been any complaints against them.

POLITICS IS CAUSING A HUGE PROBLEM FOR GEN Z'S HIV EDUCATION

While knowledge about HIV is mostly stable across the United States, one generation does have a significant gap in knowledge when compared to their peers: Gen Z. Only 37% of Gen Z-aged people, ranging from ages 18 to 26, said they feel knowledgeable about HIV, according to GLAAD's report this year. That percentage is steady from a similar sample asked the same question five years ago,

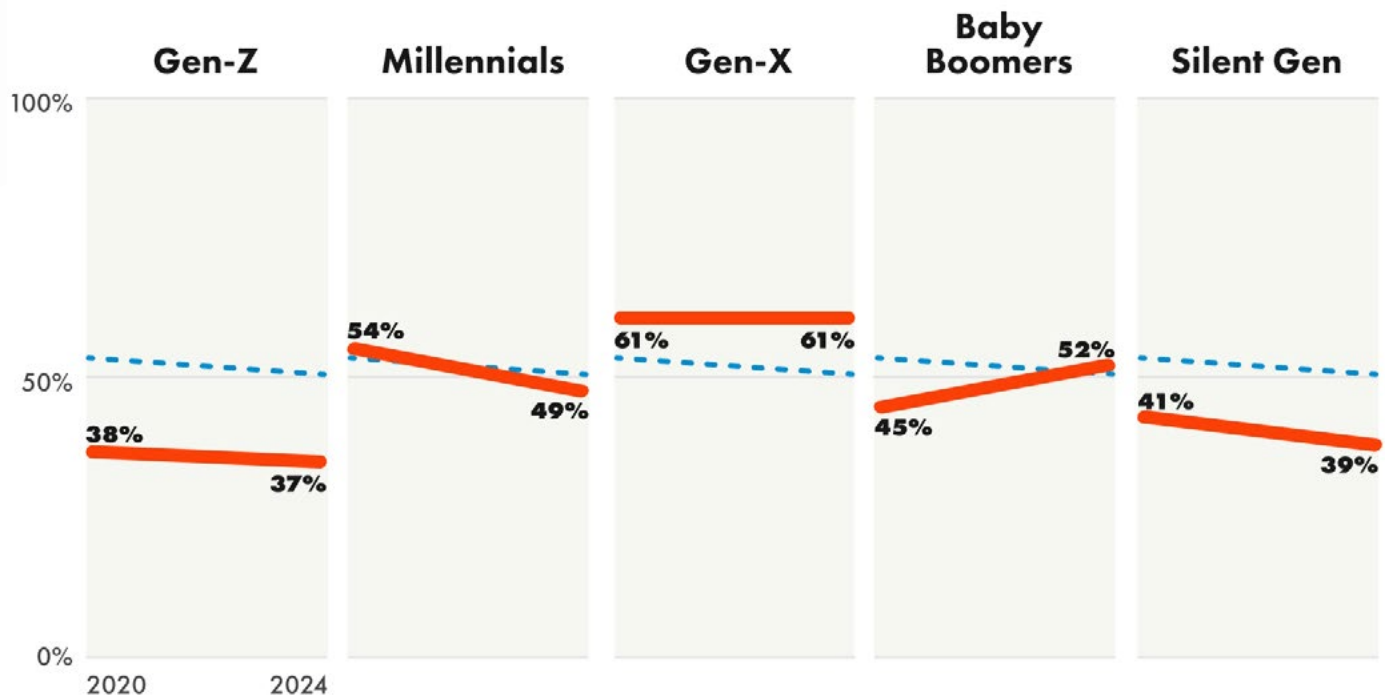
but lagging behind their millennial and Gen X counterparts, as well as the total US average, which sits at about half.

Born after the earliest days of the AIDS epidemic and coming of age at a time when media depictions about HIV are dwindling, Gen Z does not have the same level of access to HIV as generations prior.

The generational gap in knowledge of HIV continues

Although stable, Gen Z adults continue to be the least knowledgeable generation about HIV compared to older generations.

% agree: I feel knowledgeable about HIV



Camryn Garrett, author of the book *Full Disclosure*, which features a Black woman born with HIV as a protagonist, is a Gen Z-er and said that she got no education around HIV in her high school health class. The only education about the virus at her high school in Long Island, New York, was a made-for-TV movie in which a person received an HIV diagnosis as punishment for bad behavior.

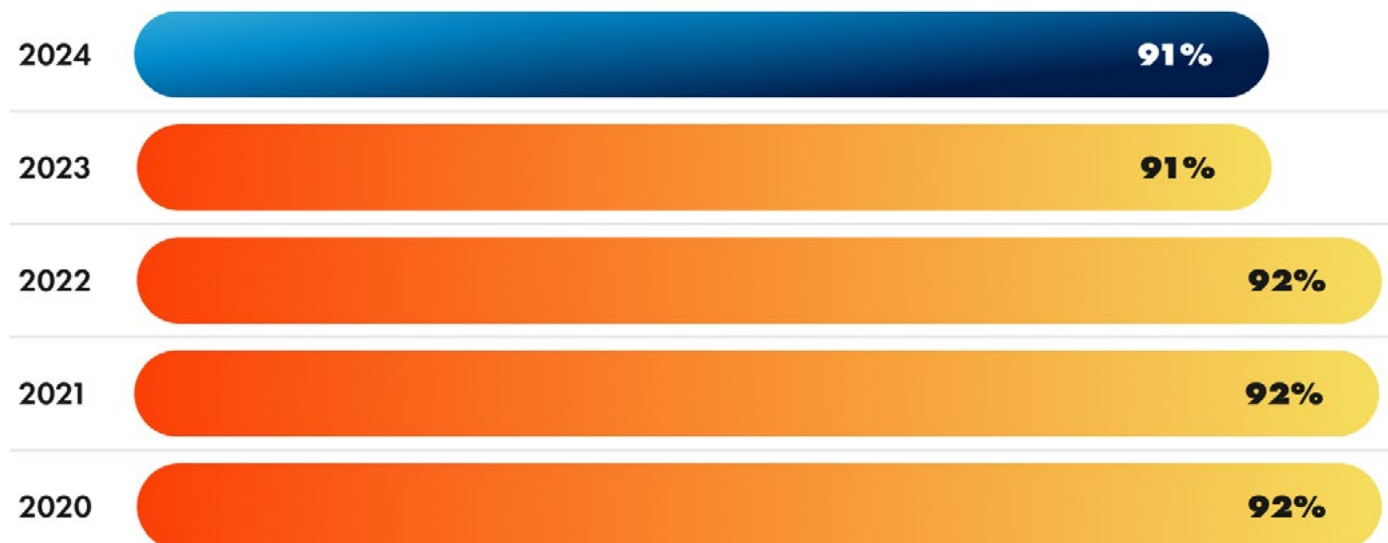
Garrett got the idea for *Full Disclosure* after reading

asking this question. However, as anti-LGBTQ+ bills sweep the United States, information about sexual health, including HIV/AIDS education has been swept up in some lawmakers' plans to limit students' access to information about sex, sexuality, sexual orientation and gender identity.

In 2023, Iowa governor Kim Reynolds signed SF 496, a bill that prohibited any discussion of gender identity or sexual orientation in grade school classrooms. The bill also

Americans continue to place a high importance on information about HIV being available in the community

% agree: it is important that information about HIV be easily available in the community



adoption blogs and realizing that many young people with HIV were adopted across international and racial lines. Because she was not supplied with an adequate education in school around HIV, she didn't realize that people with HIV could lead long, healthy lives and she had learned nothing about the AIDS crisis.

"Our history classes just sort of stopped before that," she said. "It went up to the 1950s and 1960s and stopped. It's not on any AP exam, the state exam, we just never talked about it."

A majority of Americans want information about HIV to be made available to the community; 91% of people GLAAD surveyed said they want accurate information about the virus to be readily available, including 89% of Gen Z adults. The interest in this information being readily available has remained stable over the five years that GLAAD has been

included a ban on information about HIV and HPV¹⁷. The Iowa bill emulates other anti-LGBTQ+ education bills that made their way through statehouses in recent years, a list that most famously includes Florida's "Don't Say Gay" bill.

While that bill does allow for the instruction of material related to HIV/AIDS, any educational materials must be approved by the state and be linked to an abstinence-only based sexual education curriculum¹⁸. Parents may also opt to remove their children from information about HIV/AIDS¹⁹. And, curricula aside, many queer high schoolers are reporting that it's becoming even harder to create high school GSAs, meant as places for queer students to gather²⁰.

When Garrett wrote *Full Disclosure* in high school, she had to undertake her own research in order to learn more about HIV. And when she did, she often found narratives that

spoke solely about white, gay men. Then she read a story about a young Black girl trying to access HIV medication in a newspaper. “It was the first time that I saw a narrative about what it was like to grow up with HIV and it was the first time I saw a Black girl at the center of it,” she said

Of course, Gen Z is not a monolith and so much of how Gen Z accesses information, as evidenced above, can be as particular as what state, or even zip code, a person was born in.

“As a state, we don’t have really good comprehensive sex ed, and or LGBTQ affirming sex ed in schools,” said Domenico Ruggerio, the executive director of We Are Family, a South Carolina-based nonprofit that offers comprehensive sex education to LGBTQ+ youth. “Our legislature is hell bent on policing trans youth bodies from the books that they read, the

sports that they play, and now sort of access to healthcare.”

Ruggerio says that roadblocks exist for people in some red states in ways that go far beyond education. In some states with less of a public transit infrastructure, for instance, there are fewer ways to have public service announcements or campaigns that raise awareness around public health. “You don’t have public transportation with messages around HIV like you can on the coasts,” he said.

Gen Z, and the generation after them, are facing an overlapping crisis of lack of access to information about HIV. And, with fewer pieces of film and television media portraying characters living with or dealing with HIV, this generation is not getting the HIV information they deserve, just as we are at a critical juncture in the ongoing epidemic.

A majority of Americans want information about HIV to be made available to the community; 91% of people GLAAD surveyed said they want accurate information about the virus to be readily acceptable, including 89% of Gen Z adults.

METHODOLOGY

The 2024 State of HIV Stigma Study was conducted through an online survey in January 2024 among a sample of 2,511 U.S. adults 18+. The sample was sourced and aggregated through CINT, who has the world's largest consumer network for digital survey-based research.

ANNOTATIONS

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GLAAD rewrites the script for LGBTQ acceptance. As a dynamic media force, GLAAD tackles tough issues to shape the narrative and provoke dialogue that leads to cultural change. GLAAD protects all that has been accomplished and creates a world where everyone can live the life they love.

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