

Reduce Stigma and Improve Mental Wellbeing in NTDs *Guides on Health-Related Stigma and Mental Wellbeing*



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Health-related stigma is a major barrier to achieving universal health coverage. Fear of stigma deters people from seeking healthcare, adding to the risk of disability and ongoing medical issues – which can themselves result in stigma and discrimination. Around half of the twenty diseases classified by the World Health Organization (WHO) as neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) have stigmatising consequences. Sometimes this is a direct result of the disease and sometimes it is because of long-held negative attitudes towards people affected by the disease. As a result, individuals and families experience social isolation, with major impacts on mental wellbeing and poverty.

Health and social welfare departments, non-governmental organisations and other agencies need help to better understand what stigma is and what can be done to reduce its impact. Responding to this need, the International Federation of Anti-Leprosy Associations (ILEP) and Neglected Tropical Disease NGO Network (NNN) will shortly launch Guides on Health-Related Stigma and Mental Wellbeing.

The Guides have information on how stigma manifests and its association with mental wellbeing. Measurement tools are discussed, such as stigma scales that assess the experience of stigma among people affected by NTDs. Recommendations include practical measures to promote access and inclusion of people affected by NTD-related disabilities, for example through their

involvement in implementing interventions, or through facilitating peer-support groups to reduce stigma against NTDs, in the community and among health workers. Additionally, there is practical advice on training health workers or peer counsellors to provide Psychological First Aid, and training staff and volunteers to be aware of, and to show sensitivity towards, the emotional needs of persons affected by NTDs. The Guides are written to complement a manual on mental health and NTDs, which should be published by WHO in the coming months.

The complete series:

- ***What is health-related stigma and mental wellbeing?*** Basic information about stigma, its causes and manifestations, as well as on mental wellbeing
- ***What can we do to reduce the impact of stigma?*** The importance of providing psychological first aid, the role of ‘champions’, and setting up support groups
- ***Interventions to reduce sources of stigma.*** Targeting interventions to different audiences
- ***How to assess health-related stigma and mental wellbeing.*** Qualitative and quantitative methods and instruments for assessing the level and significance of stigma and mental wellbeing

For more information on the forthcoming Guides please look on www.infoNTD.org.