

‘We are the solution’

New anti-stigma campaign launched for Irish AIDS Day.

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High resolution versions of the campaign materials can be downloaded here:
www.actupdublin.com/we-are-the-solution

[Dublin]

Marking Irish AIDS Day, ACT UP Dublin and masc.life today launched a new social media campaign highlighting the health and prevention benefits of HIV treatment.

The “We are the solution” campaign features men living with HIV explaining how effective treatment keeps them healthy and eliminates the risk of HIV being passed on during sex.

This new initiative is part of the international “U=U” campaign. That campaign, started in 2016 by the US-based Prevention Access Campaign¹, promotes the message that “undetectable equals untransmittable”.

When someone is on effective HIV treatment with an undetectable viral load, there is no risk of the virus being transmitted sexually—even when other prevention methods (condoms, PEP, or PrEP) are not used.

Based on the strength of the evidence from numerous large studies as well as decades of real-world experience, the U=U message has been endorsed by hundreds of community organisations, medical bodies, and health authorities including UNAIDS, the US Centers for Disease Control, and the NHS.

In an editorial last year *The Lancet HIV* described the impact of the campaign:

U=U is a simple but hugely important campaign based on a solid foundation of scientific evidence. It has already been successful in influencing public opinion, causing more people with HIV (and their friends and families) to comprehend that they can live long, healthy lives, have children, and never have to worry about passing on their infection to others.²

For this campaign, ACT UP Dublin joined with masc.life, a website that features photographs of and interviews with “men who are not straight.”

Andrew Leavitt of ACT UP Dublin said, “We wanted to feature real people, showing their faces, using their real names, and speaking in their own words. Stephen had done these great interviews for masc.life where guys talked about living with HIV.”

¹ www.preventionaccess.org

² “U=U taking off in 2017” *The Lancet HIV*, November 2017. [www.thelancet.com/journals/lanhiv/article/PIIS2352-3018\(17\)30183-2/fulltext](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanhiv/article/PIIS2352-3018(17)30183-2/fulltext)

Stephen Moloney from masc.life added, “When they asked me about linking the interviews to this campaign I agreed without hesitation. I’m so grateful to everyone who is part of masc.life and was delighted that it could be part of something that will reach a wider audience with such a powerful message.”

The campaign’s upbeat name—“We are the solution”—challenges the perception that people living with HIV are a public health threat or a problem to be managed.

Robbie Lawlor, one of the men featured in the campaign, explained “The fact is that one of the best ways we have to end new HIV transmissions is to help people living with HIV know their status and get access to proper care and treatment.”

With its smiling and vibrant images, the campaign aims to be affirming and uplifting. Tonie Walsh explained why he wanted to participate: “We are excited to share this information because it’s really good news. Knowing that I can’t pass HIV on is liberating, of course we’re happy about it!”

Treatment and care for HIV is free in Ireland, and HSE figures indicate that the overwhelming majority of people who are in care are on treatment and virally suppressed. Regrettably, public attitudes about HIV have not advanced as quickly as medical science, and people living with HIV continue to face discrimination and stigma. This was underscored in a survey conducted last year by HIV Ireland which found that almost one fifth of people living with HIV reported feeling suicidal in the last year.³

As Daniel Santos, also featured in the campaign, said, “My HIV is undetectable, I’m healthy and the scientific evidence shows that I’m a form of protection against the virus: I can’t pass it on to anyone else. There’s no doubt that stigma is the biggest problem we face and we need to challenge its foundations—lack of education and ignorance—with medical evidence. That’s what this campaign is about!”

Although this particular campaign is focused just on gay and bisexual men, the creators hope to see more inclusive and representative campaigns in the future.

ACT UP Dublin’s Will St. Leger says “We’ve been taught to be so afraid of HIV for so long that the U=U message can be difficult for people to accept. But U=U is a message that needs to be heard throughout the country, not just in the LGBT community.”

The science is clear: when HIV medication is working, there’s no risk of passing on HIV. Letting people living with HIV show the reality of HIV today, and what U=U means to them, is a powerful challenge to outdated ideas and the stigma they enable.

#WeAreThe Solution
#UequalsU

³ “HIV in Ireland 2017: Summary Report” HIV Ireland 2017. www.hivireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/Summary_Report_HIV_Survey_2017.pdf

ACT UP Dublin is a local chapter of ACT UP, The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, an international HIV activist organisation. ACT UP Dublin was founded in July 2016 to take action on Ireland's HIV crisis. We seek a more urgent and effective response to HIV from government, community organisations, and the public at large.

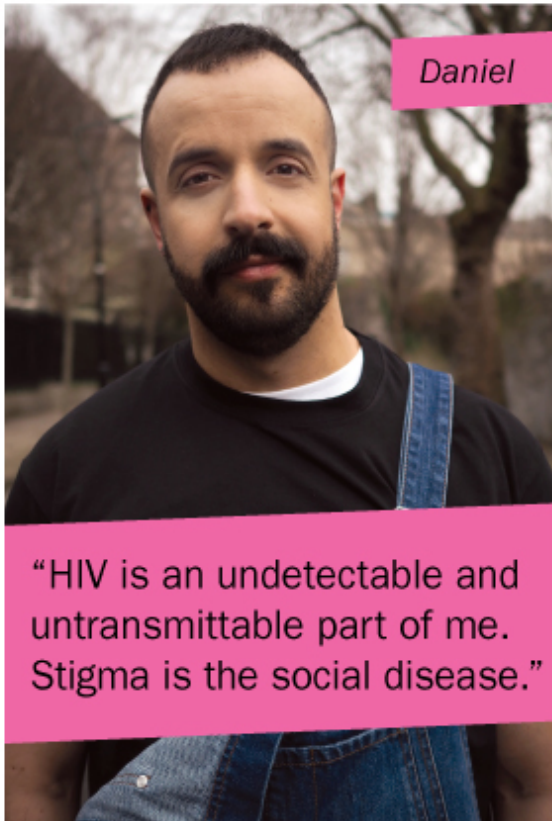


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Masc.life is website about the lives of men who are not straight. Through long and short interviews, visual stories, and personal commentary masc.life investigates the fascinating things gay, bi, and queer cisgender and transgender men are doing; where and how they are living; what they think about themselves, each other, and the world; how they look and what they wear; and what it means to be a man, if anything, prefaced by the above terms today.



@mascdotlife
www.masc.life



We are on effective treatment so our HIV is undetectable. That means we're healthy and we can't pass the virus on.

We are taking care of ourselves and taking care of each other.
We are the **solution**.

Read about Daniel, Tonie and Robbie at www.masc.life or visit actupdublin.com

