

A Shared Journey: Overcoming Health Challenges Together



When confronted with a challenge, especially one related to health, community engagement assumes a prominent role. In such circumstances, it becomes imperative for communities to respond collectively by standing strong together. Today, active community participation is key in finding implementable solutions that are instrumental in overcoming public health threats.¹

It is not uncommon for those faced with health challenges to feel overwhelmed and isolated. In these cases, communities serve as a strong support system that provides comfort to reduce anxiety and motivation to overcome challenges. This support tends to foster a sense of belonging for individuals, making them more likely to take care of their health and adhere to their course of treatment.

In addition to this support, it is important that an individual has the right knowledge and information and access to resources about their health to make informed decisions. This focus on knowledge is equally important for communities as a whole too, as an informed community is a more supportive one, leading with fact and not myth. The dissemination of accurate information can also assist in the countering fear of illnesses that commonly stems from misinformation. The circulation of appropriate knowledge can even disseminate important information about prevention and can encourage early testing.

Health seeking behaviour is to be encouraged, to promote an understanding of personal health, its implications and the motivations to access community healthcare.

¹ Community engagement: a health promotion guide for universal health coverage in the hands of the people. Geneva: World Health Organisation; 2020.

For individuals to access quality healthcare, awareness and self-awareness about health and the implications of health-seeking behaviours is crucial, and communities play a vital role in this. When community members actively participate in their own healthcare, they become partners in the decision-making process. This collaboration ensures that healthcare professionals have a clear understanding of the needs of different communities, to be able to improve healthcare systems and therefore make it more accessible and effective. By working together, communities and healthcare professionals can develop tailored solutions that address specific health adversities efficiently.

While a collective community voice is instrumental in challenging stigma and discrimination based on health statuses, it can also play a role in influencing health policies.² At the same time, advocacy from within communities can result in the removal of self-stigma, social barriers and myths related to illnesses, to provide better, more equal and if required, more culturally appropriate access to healthcare.

The CLM Approach

With a democratic 'Nothing About Us Without Us' approach, Community Led Monitoring (CLM) is working towards improving HIV service delivery to make healthcare more accessible to people living with HIV (PLHIV) and key populations (KP). Along with this, another primary goal of CLM is to create a second line of leadership for communities, with representatives from these very communities. CLM is continually focused on putting communities at the heart of all that the programme strives to achieve, and in this way, helps people foster solidarity to better understand HIV and combat it.

CLM is a part of Community System Strengthening (CSS) which prioritises creating systems strengthening and frameworks that allow communities to collaboratively work with the key stakeholders such as service providers at the facility level, key beneficiaries, etc and respond to challenges, thus empowering them. Creating such frameworks requires the active involvement of communities, to propagate change and clearly understand how to respond to challenges independently.

Community led approaches such as CLM provide evidence that community participation can have a profound impact on health services and the overall health of communities. By involving the community in system strengthening of HIV programmes, their insights, experiences and perspectives are valued and appropriately incorporated into decision making processes.

CLM recognises the knowledge that community members possess, enabling them to actively contribute to shaping effective strategies and interventions. In this manner, with regard to CLM, through meaningful engagement and participation, community members have become partners in the shared responsibility of combating HIV to achieve positive health outcomes.

² Vogel, D. L., Corrigan, P. W., Marsella, A. J., & Beveridge, A. T. J. (Eds.). (2021). The Oxford handbook of stigma, discrimination, and health. Oxford University Press.

Do read our other articles on the CLM Programme:

- [Community Led Monitoring: Achieving Impact in Round 1](#)
- [Democratising HIV Care](#)
- [HIV Positive and Homeless: The Effect of HIV Stigmatisation](#)
- [The Impact of Stigma on Health Outcomes](#)

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If you have any such stories or ideas to share, please write to us: impact@sattva.co.in