



Sharing U=U With Women

The Undetectable Equals Untransmittable message can help women living with HIV overcome stigma.

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According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([CDC](#)), 1.2 million Americans were living with HIV in 2019. Of those, 263,900 were women. Although new HIV diagnoses among women have been declining in recent years, nearly 7,000 women were newly diagnosed in 2019.

A 2018 [study](#) found that 40% of women living with HIV had not been informed by their medical providers about Undetectable Equals Untransmittable (U=U), the fact that a person living with HIV on effective treatment with an undetectable viral load cannot transmit the virus sexually.

Many women living with HIV are afraid to disclose their status because of stigma. Dee Conner, a creative engagements outreach specialist for [U=U Plus](#), a nonprofit that educates the public about U=U, says, “The hardest part for me is the women who reach out who have lived with HIV for years and are still afraid of someone finding out.”

The encouraging message of U=U has the power to lighten the stigma of an HIV diagnosis. “U=U changes people’s lives, erasing stigma and fear and allowing them to have pleasurable sex without fear of transmitting HIV to their sexual partners,” says Murray Penner, the executive director of U=U Plus.

Still, the message of U=U struggles to find mainstream acceptance. Penner said more people across more groups and demographics are aware of and understand U=U, yet not enough studies are conducted to determine which populations are being impacted by the message.

Nonetheless, Conner is encouraged. “We’ve come a long way,” she says. “Today you see the message on individual profiles and on dating app; you see people in the community with T-shirts on or even a button.”

Conner hopes more advocates will push U=U so that more communities—minority groups, women, transgender people—can receive the stigma-crushing idea. “And our health departments can do so much more to help change the narrative when it comes to HIV,” she says, “and that is to help those who are newly diagnosed overcome self-stigma.”
