

**Conditions favourable to sexual health** *These strategies do not have a direct impact on HIV transmission, but include different practices and contexts that promote good sexual health and contribute to putting other strategies in place.*



## ADVOCATING FOR BETTER LAWS AND POLICIES

**Advocating for the implementation of laws and policies to improve the conditions that influence vulnerability to HIV**

### Description

- Better laws and policies is a strategy that involves to addressing the social factors (socio-cultural, economic, political, legal and other contextual aspects) that increase vulnerability to HIV and other STIs among men who have sex with men.
- Examples of better laws and policies include:<sup>1</sup>
  - Fighting against homophobia and biphobia.
  - Fighting against transphobia.
  - Fighting against serophobia.
  - Ending the criminalization of people living with HIV
  - Recognizing civil unions and marriage between people of the same sex.
  - Recognizing adoption for people of the same sex.
  - Programs that provide access to sterile drug-use equipment.
  - Programs that provide access to prevention material (condoms and lubricant).
  - Sex education in schools.
  - Access to medical insurance.
  - Laws related to sex work.
  - Policies related to sexual and domestic violence.
- Individuals can contribute to improving laws and policies in a number of ways, such as by getting involved in campaigns for better laws and policies, by organizing community mobilization activities related to a particular issue, by starting a petition to put pressure on policy makers, by participating in program improvements that already exist, or by taking part in community projects or events aimed at improving laws and policies.

### Effectiveness

- Laws and policies are not directly targeted at the behaviour of individuals, but rather aim to create or maintain a social environment that is favourable to health and reduces risk and vulnerability to HIV and other STIs. Better laws and policies can also have an impact in promoting access to services that respond to the needs and realities of MSM.<sup>1</sup>
- For example, one study has found lower rates of internalized homophobia (negative attitudes towards your own sexuality) in jurisdictions with laws recognizing same sex relationships and allowing adoption by same sex couples.<sup>2</sup>

### Acceptability

- Advantages of advocating for better laws and policies:
  - May give rise to feelings of doing something to make your community better.<sup>3</sup>
  - May ultimately have an impact on the social environment.
  - Makes it possible for people in charge to hear your concerns and ideas.
  - Helps to ensure that social change and medical breakthroughs are taken into account in our laws and policies.<sup>3</sup>
- Disadvantages of advocating for better laws and policies:
  - May be difficult to come up with concrete ideas to put this strategy into action.<sup>3</sup>

- May require getting involved in an organization that campaigns for these issues.
- Does not offer any direct protection against HIV and STIs.

#### References

1. Gupta, G. R., Parkhurst, J. O., Ogden, J. A., Aggleton, P. & Mahal, A. (2008). Structural approaches to HIV prevention. *The Lancet*, 372, 764-775.
2. Berg, R. C., Ross, M. W., Weatherburn, P. & Schmidt, A. J. (2013). Structural and environmental factors are associated with internalised homonegativity in men who have sex with men: Findings from the European MSM Internet Survey (EMIS) in 38 countries. *Social Science & Medicine*, 78, 61-69.
3. Projet MOBILISE!. (2017). *Données issues des équipes citoyennes de projet MOBILISE!* (internal document).