GUIDELINES FOR GENDER-INCLUSIVE AND NON-STIGMATIZING COMMUNICATION

IrsiCaixa AIDS Research Institute

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Plan 2020-2022

IrsiCaixa
Institut de Recerca de la Sida

INTRODUCTION

The IrsiCaixa AIDS Research Institute, in line with its commitment to make progress in **equality among any gender**, as well as to **eliminate any stigma** when communicating about any disease (i.e. HIV), wishes to promote the use of inclusive and non-stigmatizing language.

Since its origins (1995), the institution has advocated, without any kind of discrimination, for egalitarian training, innovation and knowledge transfer, the promotion of health and wellbeing, and communication between the scientific community and society. With the conviction that **language is a fundamental tool** in promoting all these aspects, IrsiCaixa has produced a guide that includes specific guidelines and resources for choosing an inclusive way of transmitting any message. This action is another step forward in the defence of equal opportunities among genders and different population groups.

The guide aims to be a useful tool for society, especially for the scientific community, offering **inclusive and non-stigmatizing linguistic strategies** that can be used on a daily basis. The aim of this guide, therefore, is to resolve any doubts that may arise when writing a text or preparing an oral presentation, offering linguistic resources that promote inclusion. However, the adoption of these new forms of expression should be done in a natural way, **without compromising the coherence of the texts**.

We therefore encourage everyone to use this guide to help express themselves in an inclusive and non-stigmatizing way in their messages. In order to facilitate its use, the guide has been developed with a focus on synthesis and conciseness. In this way, the aim is to encourage the maximum number of people in the community to use this resource.

ONLY MAKE GENDER VISIBLE WHEN NEEDED

Gender markers in English are not abundant: the **pronouns** and **possessives** (she/her and he/his); and **some nouns** and **forms of address**. Most English nouns do not have grammatical gender forms, whereas a few nouns are specifically masculine or feminine. Some nouns that once ended in -man now have neutral equivalents that are used to include both genders (i.e. chair/chairperson for chairman). Despite de low presence of gender markers in English, many strategies can be applied to be more gender-inclusive.

MAKING GENDER VISIBLE

Feminine, masculine and non binary pronouns

Gender identity is an internal characteristic that should not be assumed. For that reason, the best we can do is to ask for the person's pronouns. In addition to the binary English pronouns "**she/her**" and "**he/his**", some people may use **non-binary pronouns**, including the pronouns "**they/their**" used as singular terms, among others. Nevertheless, when using the singular "they," we need to still conjugate the verb as a plural.

When writing about a hypothetical person, like an anonymous participant in a study enrolling people of all genders, use the singular "they" rather than "he or she" to be inclusive.

Mixed groups: when we want to highlight the presence of feminine and masculine gender

When we want to make women and men visible when referring to a group of people, we can use both feminine and masculine forms. However, it is advisable not to overuse this strategy since it may be distracting to the reader. i.e. *If a researcher of this group wants to apply for the grant offer, **he or she** may submit all the required documents*.

In this line, we can also use two separate words. i.e. *All of the students, both **girls and boys**, should attend the first seminar about Sexually Transmitted Infections*.

NOT MAKING GENDER VISIBLE

Plural pronouns

Plural pronouns (**they/their**) may be used to ensure gender inclusiveness, either when we do not know the gender of the person or when the person feels represented by a non-binary gender.

Pronoun *one* and *who*

USE THIS…	…INSTEAD OF THIS
A patient **who** wants to have a visit with the doctor needs to make an appointment first	If a patient wants to have a visit with the doctor, **he** needs to make an appointment first
The reputation of a researcher in Spain is the same as **one** in Italy	The reputation of a researcher in Spain is the same as the reputation **he** would have in Italy

Omiting gendered words

USE THIS…	…INSTEAD OF THIS
The candidate must submit all the documents before **appliying** for the position	The candidate must submit all the documents before **he** applies for the position

Passive voice

USE THIS…	…INSTEAD OF THIS
The author of the paper must reference all the **added** information	The author of the paper must reference all the information **he** is adding

FORMS OF ADDRESS

It is common to see men being addressed as Mr., while women are addressed as Ms. or Mrs. depending on their marital status. To avoid this discrimination against women, we should **give precedence to Ms. over Mrs**., as the former is more inclusive and can refer to any woman, regardless of marital status.

RECOMMENDATIONS WHEN COMMUNICATING ABOUT HIV AND RELATED TOPICS

Below we list some language suggestions for communicating about HIV and related topics. These suggestions, proposed by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), aim to eliminate any stigmatising language towards HIV and related issues in any of our messages.

USE THIS…	…INSTEAD OF THIS	BECAUSE…
HIV, HIV disease	HIV infection	
People living with HIV	HIV-infected people, HIV cases	
People without HIV	HIV-uninfected people	"Infection" carries the stigma of being contagious
HIV transmissions, new HIV diagnoses	New HIV infections	
Transmit	Infect	
Acquired	Became infected	
HIV	HIV/AIDS	AIDS evokes suffering and death and should be used only when describing specifically AIDS. HIV is inclusive of both HIV and AIDS when the reference is not specific
Affected community, high-incidence population	High-risk population	People and communities are not inherently risky

USE THIS…	…INSTEAD OF THIS	BECAUSE…
Condomless sex, sex without the use of prevention tools	Unprotected/unsafe sex	The preferred terms are more specific, accurate and remove judgement
Perinatal/vertical transmission	Mother-to-child transmission	The preferred terms do not place blame on women
Died from complications related to HIV, died of an AIDS-related illness	Died of AIDS	The preferred terms avoid the incorrect assumption that AIDS is uniformly fatal and clarify that opportunistic infections are the acute cause of death
HIV response	HIV elimination/eradication	These terms may have a paternalistic and militaristic connotation and imply people living with HIV must disappear to achieve an end to the epidemic
Research participant, volunteer	Research subject, patient	"Subject" is dehumanizing. Not all participants are patients
Priority population/group, key population/group	Targeted population/group	These preferred terms emphasize community-oriented, participatory approaches to ending an epidemic, instead of paternalistic, top-down approaches

USE THIS…	…INSTEAD OF THIS	BECAUSE…
Person behaviorally vulnerable to HIV	At-risk person, person who engages in risk behaviors, person who puts themselves at risk	People do not have inherent risk
Likelihood, chance	Risk	The preferred terms help reduce passivity applied to populations
Has multiple sexual partners	Promiscuous	Avoid "promiscuity" and its derivatives, as it is an unnecessary value judgement
Internal condom	Female condom	Some transgender men and nonbinary people may use internal condoms vaginally, and people of all genders can use internal condoms for anal sex
External condom	Male condom	Some transgender women and nonbinary people may use external condoms for intercourse; people of all genders may cut external condoms to create dental dams

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Gender-inclusive language, United Nations
NIAID HIV Language Guide, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID)