



Mind in Croydon Limited

HIV/AIDS Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Mind in Croydon acknowledges that staff, volunteers and service users may experience concerns about HIV/Aids. These may be directly related to concerns about their own and others' health and safety or to fears about discrimination in employment, housing or access to services.
- 1.2 This policy has been produced to help demonstrate Mind in Croydon's positive commitment towards people affected by HIV/Aids and to help ensure that no-one faces discrimination from Mind in Croydon on the basis of their HIV status.
- 1.3 This policy document should be read in conjunction with Mind in Croydon's Equal Opportunities, Health and Safety, Confidentiality and Sickness Policies.

2. Definitions

- 2.1 HIV stands for *Human Immunodeficiency Virus*.
HIV can damage the immune system, weakening the body's defences against infections which would be fought off under other circumstances. An HIV test is usually for antibodies to HIV and where such antibodies are found, a person is said to be HIV positive or HIV antibody positive. Many people carrying the HIV virus are well and may be unaware that they have been infected.
- 2.2 AIDS stands for *Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome*.
When someone is diagnosed as having Aids, it means that a collection ("syndrome") of specific infections has been identified which are related to damage to the immune system as a result of HIV infection. Many of these infections can be successfully treated and people living with Aids are often well for long periods with only occasional acute episodes of illness.
- 2.3 How is the Virus spread?
HIV is a very vulnerable virus and does not survive long outside the body. Consequently, it is far less infectious than many other viruses. It is passed on in three ways:
 - By exposure to, and transfer of, infected blood or blood products into the bloodstream.
 - Through unsafe sex with an infected person and the exchange of semen and vaginal secretions.
 - From a mother who is HIV positive to her unborn or newborn child.
- 2.4 HIV is not spread through normal social contact such as shaking hands or touching. Neither is it transferred through sneezing, coughing, sharing cutlery or crockery, or using communal toilet or shower facilities.

3. Employment of Staff

- 3.1 In line with Mind in Croydon's Equal Opportunities Policy, there will be no discrimination against any job applicant or employee on the grounds that they, or a member of their immediate family, is HIV positive or has Aids.
- 3.2 No applicant or employee will be required to reveal their HIV antibody status or to undergo an HIV antibody test. No-one will be dismissed on the grounds of HIV or Aids.
- 3.3 An employee with HIV infection will receive the same occupational benefits as any other employee. If unwell, they will be treated as any other employee who is unwell. Employees with HIV related illnesses will be supported in continuing to work for as long as they are fit to do so. Requests for redeployment, or changes in working hours or responsibilities, on the grounds of illness will be treated sympathetically within the limitations imposed by the size of the organisation. [See *Sickness Policy*].
- 3.4 Those who have responsibility for caring for people with HIV related illness will be considered for special leave. [See *Contract of Employment*].

4. Volunteers

- 4.1 Mind in Croydon is committed to the principle of supporting and encouraging the involvement of volunteers in its work.
- 4.2 Mind in Croydon will not discriminate against current or prospective volunteers who disclose that they, or a member of their immediate family, is HIV positive or has Aids. Nor will they require any volunteer to reveal their HIV antibody status or to undergo an HIV antibody test.
- 4.3 If a volunteer chooses to disclose their HIV antibody status, this information will be treated in the strictest confidence within the boundaries outlined in the confidentiality section of this policy. This information will not influence any decision to terminate the volunteer's placement or prejudice the volunteering opportunities made available to them.
- 4.4 A volunteer who is living with HIV infection or who has Aids may find the regularity of their volunteering commitment affected by illness or hospital appointments. Any volunteer in this situation will be supported and encouraged to continue their volunteering for as long as they are able, in accordance with their individual needs.
- 4.5 When people volunteer to work in an ongoing relationship with individual service users, for example as befrienders or counsellors, their ability to maintain continuity in the relationship will be one of the criteria considered before offering them a placement. The health of the volunteer could therefore be of significance. However, in deciding whether the person is likely to be able to maintain continuity Mind will make no distinction between HIV/AIDs or any other physical or mental health condition which might affect the person's capability.
- 4.6 Volunteers will be expected to adhere to the same principles as paid staff in their work for Mind in Croydon. Hence volunteers will be expected **not** to discriminate against service users with HIV or Aids; to respect the confidentiality of any personal information about a member of staff or service user that they become aware of in the course of their work; and to observe the organisation's health and safety guidelines.

5. Service Users

- 5.1 Mind in Croydon acknowledges that some service users may face an increased risk of infection from HIV due to a lack of access to appropriate sources of information. They may also face an increased risk of exposure to unsafe sexual practices arising from the impact of their mental health difficulties on their ability to make judgements about sexual health risks.
- 5.2 Staff will be expected to address issues of positive sexual health with service users when the opportunity arises and will be considered to have a general responsibility to raise awareness around HIV/Aids and to ensure that service users have access to information and advice about safer sex.
- 5.3 No service user should face discrimination in their access to Mind services due to their HIV status. Since there is no risk of transmission of HIV through general social contact, there are no grounds for any individual being excluded from Mind services solely on grounds of their HIV status. Service users who become unwell with HIV related illnesses will be treated in the same way as any other service user facing a potentially life threatening illness. In the case of group home residents, Mind will seek to enable residents to remain in their home for as long as is practicable although this will be dependent on the receipt of appropriate support from the statutory care services.

6. Confidentiality

- 6.1 Mind in Croydon accepts a general obligation to ensure that all personal and medical information about staff, volunteers and service users is kept confidential. This includes information about an individual's HIV status.
- 6.2 However, Mind in Croydon's Confidentiality Policy acknowledges that there may be rare occasions when it is deemed necessary to breach that confidentiality in the interests of the health and welfare of a particular individual or of other staff or service users. The decision to break confidentiality should always be referred to the senior worker of the particular project and any such breaches should always be limited on a strictly "need-to-know" basis i.e. information should only be made available to those individuals who have a direct need to know in order to help or protect the individual or others.
- 6.3 Heightened fears about the potential risks of HIV infection may cause staff, volunteers or service users to feel tempted towards unnecessarily breaching confidentiality about an individual's HIV status. Fears about the risks of infection should be dealt with by participatory education and training for staff, volunteers and service users.
- 6.4 Breaches of confidentiality will rarely serve to protect others against HIV infection but will often open opportunities for direct and indirect discrimination against individuals with HIV. Anyone with HIV infection whose status is known, should be reassured about Mind's commitment to confidentiality and to protecting individuals from discrimination. Permission of the individual concerned to inform others of their HIV status should be sought wherever possible.

7. Health and Safety

- 7.1 Standard Health and Safety procedures provide adequate protection against infection from HIV. Health and Safety guidelines including proper hygiene procedures should be followed at all times and appropriate equipment such as disposable gloves, paper towels, bleach and

other disinfectants will be made available. Since many people infected with HIV are unaware that they carry the virus, the use of standard hygiene procedures provide more appropriate and effective protection from HIV infection than knowledge of the HIV status of individuals.

For further information see Mind in Croydon's Health and Safety Policy.

8. Training

- 8.1 In order to increase awareness and knowledge of the issues and facts surrounding HIV and Aids, Mind in Croydon is committed to ensuring HIV training is made available for all staff, volunteers and service users. Basic HIV awareness training will be incorporated into the induction process for all new staff. Such training will also be open to Mind volunteers and service users.

9. Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures

- 9.1 As with all Mind in Croydon policies, failure to observe this policy by staff or volunteers will be treated as a disciplinary matter. Any member of staff, volunteer or service user who feels that they have been unfairly treated with regard to their HIV status will be positively supported and encouraged in taking their complaint forward through Mind in Croydon's Complaints Procedure or Grievance Procedure for Employees.

10. Monitoring and Evaluation

- 10.1 This policy document will reviewed and monitored annually through Mind in Croydon's Executive Committee.
- 10.2 Discussions on and contributions towards the review of this policy will be actively sought from staff, volunteers and service users.