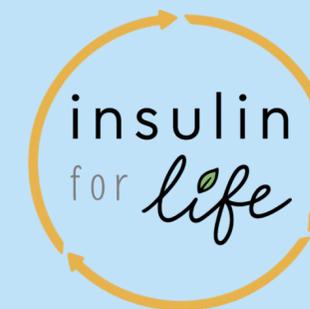


Diabetes stigma as a human rights issue: How discrimination restricts participation and how international law can support accountability and system reform

Authors: Emma Klatman¹ Frank Brennan² Alicia Jenkins³ Graham Ogle¹



Background

Diabetes stigma and discrimination undermine dignity, constrain access to lifesaving care, and limit the ability of people living with diabetes to influence decisions affecting their own health. Our group previously undertook work examining rights-based advocacy, discrimination, and exclusion from participation through a human rights lens.

Opportunities

International human rights law provides a structured way to identify discriminatory or exclusionary practices, through elements of the right to health such as availability, accessibility, acceptability, quality, non-discrimination, and access to information. Two virtual rights-based workshops held in Africa (2021) and Latin America (2022) brought together people living with diabetes, families, clinicians, and human rights practitioners, including participation from the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health. Participants described discrimination, marginalisation, information gaps, and limited influence over decisions affecting their care. A multilingual Diabetes Rights Toolkit was developed in response to lived experience realities to summarise human rights concepts raised in these discussions. This work was exploratory and intended to make legal ideas more accessible rather than prescribe specific solutions.

Recommendation

Future efforts should draw on established human rights standards within national diabetes strategies, strengthen legal and civic literacy among advocates and health professionals, and foster collaboration between those with lived experience, diabetes organisations, and human rights practitioners. Human rights mechanisms can help identify discriminatory practices and clarify state obligations, while stronger local advocacy infrastructures are essential for addressing system-level stigma and exclusion.

Meaningful involvement

People living with diabetes **contributed** extensively to the workshops, raised the issues explored, and shaped the discussions and outcomes that informed this reflective work. These were early steps, and far more sustained lived experience leadership is needed for rights-based and stigma-related efforts to meaningfully uphold dignity and equality.

Affiliations:

1 Life for a Child, Diabetes Australia, Sydney, Australia

2 Calvary Health Care, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia.

3 Diabetes and Vascular Medicine Lab, Baker Heart and Diabetes Institute, Melbourne, VIC, Australia; Dept of Medicine and Therapeutics, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong.