



FINDING THE WORDS

HOW TO USE YOUR VOICE IN YOUR HIV JOURNEY

Self-advocacy (noun): The ability to articulate one's needs and make informed decisions about the support necessary to meet those needs.

You may not know it, but you are self-advocating every time you know what you need and take action to get it. When you ask someone to speak louder so you can hear them or let a cashier know you have been overcharged, that's self-advocacy. You can do the same thing in your HIV journey.

As a person living with an HIV-positive status, much of your self-advocacy may center around your health and the treatment you get. It is important to speak up and express your needs to make sure you receive the best care. The following strategies can help you find your voice to be your own best advocate with your health care team:

- Learn as much as you can about your treatment options and what it means to be living with HIV.
- Find an HIV care provider who fits your needs. A list of HIV services in your area can be found online at **HIV.gov**, including Spanish-speaking options.
- Write down questions you have and bring them with you to your next appointment with your health care provider. Ask for clarification any time you do not understand something they say.
- Bring a supportive partner or friend with you to your appointments if you think they will help you feel more confident in asking for what you need.

- Identify your HIV treatment goals and share them with your health care team. They may change as you evolve through your HIV journey, and that's okay!
- Ask questions about your medications and let your health care team know when you are having difficulty taking them for any reason. This could include side effects, cost, transportation difficulties, privacy concerns, or anything that limits your ability to take your medications as prescribed.
- Talk about health issues that are on your mind, even if they do not seem related to your HIV-positive status. This could include mental health, social services, other chronic diseases, or just preventative wellness checks.
- Jot down notes or important topics you want to research further so you can remember them when you get home.
- Keep a personal copy of your medical records and medications you are taking so you can share them with other members of your health care team and have them readily available in case of emergency.
- Remember that it is perfectly okay to get a second opinion about important health issues or switch health care providers if you do not feel you are receiving great care.
- Offer suggestions about ways to improve services for people living with HIV. A supportive health care team is always open to respectful feedback.

VISIT THE CME OUTFITTERS HIV PATIENT EDUCATION HUB FOR MORE INFORMATION AND RESOURCES TO SUPPORT YOUR HIV JOURNEY.