

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

## Establishing a Global Network to Identify, Challenge and Mitigate Abortion Stigma Background Report

JULY 2014



**inroads**

International Network for the Reduction  
of Abortion Discrimination and Stigma

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

## Establishing a Global Network to Identify, Challenge and Mitigate Abortion Stigma: Background Assessment

### INTRODUCTION

Abortion stigma is a critical factor in the social, medical and legal marginalization of abortion worldwide. The field of abortion stigma research however is nascent and there is much to be learned and understood. One of the key action items agreed upon by an international group of researchers, practitioners and advocates was the creation of a global network and community of practice to further collaboration and coordination of efforts to understand, mitigate and challenge abortion stigma.

### METHODS

In order to inform the development of a global abortion stigma network, Ipas supported background research on existing networks in the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and related fields. Through this process, we surveyed potential network members with a brief electronic questionnaire; interviewed stakeholders who have been involved in the establishment or ongoing maintenance of an existing knowledge or advocacy network and identified options for organizing the structure and key functions of the global network. Data from each source were triangulated to inform the findings and recommendations. The purpose of this assessment was to:

1. Gain an understanding of how a select group of existing knowledge and advocacy networks are structured to meet their objectives;
2. Gather lessons learned from those networks and their participants in terms of challenges and successes;
3. Seek advice and input on building a network and engaging stakeholders; and
4. Gather information from a diverse group of potential stakeholders and users of inroads on key priority areas and methods the network should employ.

## KEY FINDINGS

**Key functions of the network.** Survey respondents and stakeholders identified a variety of ways that the network could strengthen their individual and collective work on stigma. Highlights include: providing a central resource repository of tools and best practices; developing shared language about stigma; creating visionary and positive language; providing a platform for collaboration as well as a mechanism to link with other fields.

**Network engagement.** Survey respondents indicated strong interest in joining such a network and volunteered a variety of skills and resources that they are poised to share with the network members. US-based respondents and stakeholders prefer to engage by participating in listservs, sharing research findings, and sharing practical tools to mitigate stigma. Respondents outside of the United States had a stronger preference for in-person engagement strategies.

**Online tools.** Respondents prioritized a database of stigma tools and current projects, as well as a searchable research library. A majority of respondents (71%) indicated that they would use a members-only space on a network website. There is capacity among potential members to engage via social media, as 62% of respondents use Facebook and 54% use Twitter.

**Network integration.** While growing inroads, it is important to look at similar networks, coalitions, and groups that already exist. It is helpful to learn from the lessons learned, best practices and models that other groups have utilized. Respondents emphasized the importance of integrating this new network into the landscape of networks and coalitions that already exist.

**Network membership structure.** Stakeholders and survey respondents endorsed a membership structure that was open to individuals and organizations who are interested, but that would require members to endorse a simple values statement. Ultimately, the structure of membership and leadership should be generated from the needs and capacities of active members.

**Lessons and recommendations for effective networks.** Survey respondents and stakeholders had several recommendations for creating effective networks, including setting clear goals, generating priorities *up* from the membership, having a clear leadership and membership structure, ensuring transparency around funding, and maintaining manageable size, and appropriate security precautions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE GLOBAL NETWORK

Inroads (the International Network for the Reduction of Abortion Discrimination and Stigma) launched in April 2014 and was informed by the findings in this background assessment. As the network grows, we anticipate that the goals and membership structure will be refined with input from members. The proposed network goals include:

**Goal 1:** Bring together diverse stakeholders to share information, tools, and resources around abortion stigma and discrimination.

**Goal 2:** Learn from promising practices for stigma intervention.

**Goal 3:** Expand programmatic, research and advocacy strategies.

**Goal 4:** Support coordination among research, policy and practice.

**Goal 5:** Raise awareness about abortion stigma.

**Goal 6:** Develop capacity and resources for abortion stigma research and program work.

**Goal 7:** Create an innovative technology platform for inroads members.

Inroads will foster the knowledge sharing and linkages in order to catalyze members' efforts to understand, challenge, and mitigate abortion stigma across the following domains:

1. Abortion stigma in culture and discourse, including language, popular discourse and media, and news coverage
2. Abortion stigma in governments and civic structures, including laws and policies
3. Abortion stigma in organizational and institutional settings, including abortion service delivery
4. Abortion stigma in communities
5. Abortion stigma at the individual level

6. The intersection of abortion stigma with other areas of stigma and discrimination.

**Proposed network structure.** Ipas will serve as the initial host organization, and will invite members through an open call to apply to become part of the inroads' Steering Committee. This committee will reflect the geographic and thematic diversity of the global membership. It will meet on a regular basis and will inform network activities. Members of the Steering Committee will form and serve on working groups that will push forward the work of key thematic areas.

Membership is open to interested individuals and organizations that are committed to understanding, mitigating and challenging abortion stigma. In order to join, members will review a statement of the responsibilities and benefits of membership and will endorse the network's values statement: "I/we are committed to the advancement of sexual and reproductive health and rights, including the right to abortion. Abortion stigma contributes to the social, medical and legal marginalization of abortion worldwide. As part of inroads, I/we are committed to understanding, challenging and mitigating abortion stigma." Individuals who are not interested in membership have the opportunity to join the listserv in order to stay up to date on global activities around abortion stigma.

**Preliminary activities.** The background assessment established that there is a need for such a network and community of practice. Respondents are eager to collaborate in a network to understand, challenge, and mitigate abortion stigma and share expertise and resources in a community of practice around abortion stigma. In order to harness this enthusiasm, preliminary activities include launching new website features to enhance collaboration and resource sharing; refining the network's strategic plan with input from a global Steering Committee; convening a webinar series; organizing in-person membership meetings; and developing opportunities for ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

