

“You’re there to collect my cells, not to judge me”: Co-designing a lived-experience resource for inclusive cervical screening care

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Background/Purpose:

Barriers to cervical screening for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and asexual people (LGBTIQ+) with a cervix are well documented, yet care experiences remain shaped by stigma, exclusion, and non-affirming practice. While self-collected screening has reduced some barriers, prior negative experiences continue to influence engagement and trust. Developed in early 2025, this project aimed to centre lived experience in the design of a resource for healthcare providers, highlighting the impact of clinical interactions on access to and engagement with screening.

Approach:

Focus groups and interviews were conducted with LGBTIQ+ community members to explore experiences of cervical screening across healthcare settings. In parallel, healthcare providers were engaged to identify gaps in knowledge and questions they wanted answered by community members, including how to deliver affirming care and navigate sensitive clinical conversations. Data were thematically analysed and used to co-design a short video resource for healthcare providers. The video centres participant narratives to illustrate how care is experienced and is designed for use in training and professional development.

Outcomes/Impact:

Participant reported experiences of cervical screening were overwhelmingly negative. Key themes included misgendering, assumptions, provider discomfort, judgement, and experiences of pain, gender dysphoria, and physical and emotional discomfort for patients. These experiences contributed to distress, disengagement, and delayed care, and were often carried beyond the clinical encounter. In contrast, affirming care was associated with respect, comfort, communication, and trust. Translating these narratives into a video resource created a tool for provider reflection on how clinical interactions shape patient experience.

Innovation and Significance:

This project demonstrates the value of embedding lived experience in healthcare training. By integrating and aligning community narratives with provider-identified learning needs, it supports reflection and more inclusive practice. It highlights that affirming care is central to improving engagement and trust in cervical screening,

and that past experiences must be addressed alongside evolving clinical approaches.

Disclosure of Interest:

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