

Cover Yourself in Canberra: a five-year reflection on humour and cultural relevance in sexual health promotion

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Background/Purpose:

Health promotion campaigns often rely on explicit calls-to-action to influence behaviour. However, in areas shaped by stigma, such as sexual health, directive messaging can limit engagement. *Cover Yourself in Canberra* is a long-running campaign originally developed in 2002 to promote condom use while remaining suitable for the general community and visitors to the national capital. Redesigned and relaunched in 2021, the campaign draws on local humour and cultural references to create connection and recognition. Five years on, this project reflects on a deliberately non-prescriptive approach, and how cultural humour can create and maintain relevance over time.

Approach:

The campaign features illustrated depictions of iconic Canberra landmarks covered with a condom, paired with the phrase “Cover Yourself in Canberra”. Designs were developed with an illustrator and have expanded over time to include additional monuments and seasonal variations. Materials are distributed through Meridian safer sex packs and postcards across community settings. The campaign avoids a direct call-to-action, instead using humour and familiarity to prompt conversation and informal engagement across a broad audience. This reflection draws on ongoing implementation and community feedback over five years.

Outcomes/Impact:

Since 2021, the campaign has become a recognisable feature of Meridian’s health promotion work and has expanded into bike tours and website content. Community responses indicate strong engagement, with individuals collecting, displaying, and sharing materials locally and internationally. Using local humour and imagery has made safer sex packs more approachable, lowering barriers and increasing willingness to access resources. This has supported conversation and connection, embedding the campaign in community understanding rather than reliance on repeated instruction.

Innovation and Significance:

This project demonstrates that sustained engagement in sexual health promotion can be achieved without direct calls-to-action. By leveraging cultural humour and recognisable design, *Cover Yourself in Canberra* creates an accessible entry point

into sexual health, encouraging engagement and conversation while reducing stigma.

Disclosure of Interest:

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