

RESEARCH BASED TEMPLATE

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Lessons Learned from Co-Designing Mental Health Resources with LGBTQ+ Youth from CARM Backgrounds in Southwestern Sydney

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Background:

LGBTQ+ youth from culturally and racially marginalised (CARM) backgrounds in Southwestern Sydney face intersecting barriers to affirming mental health care, including racism, queerphobia, stigma, language exclusion, and limited inclusive services. Despite these challenges, these communities show resilience, knowledge, and leadership. This project aimed to understand youth mental health needs and centre these strengths through co-design of a multilingual digital hub and suicide awareness campaign, developed during a two-day designathon.

Methods:

The project was grounded in sustained community engagement. Consultations with multicultural services, LGBTQ+ organisations, and youth groups refined the scope before ethics submission. A Community Advisory Group of 12 representatives from youth, queer, and health organisations, and a Youth Advisory Group of 10 young people with lived experience, co-steered development. These groups shaped survey and focus group tools, guided the designathon structure, and advised on accessibility and promotion. Communication approaches were adapted for linguistic inclusion, cultural resonance, and youth accessibility, underpinned by strengths-based planning.

Results:

The process revealed both enabling strategies and ongoing barriers to co-designing LGBTQ+ youth initiatives in suburban, often conservative, contexts. Consistent communication fostered trust and cross-sector collaboration. Inclusive practices, such as reimbursements, shared decision-making, and accessible meeting formats, lowered participation barriers and sustained engagement. The designathon engaged 26 young people with lived experience, producing eight prototypes of the online mental health hub. Analysis of these prototypes identified four priorities: (1) clear

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service wayfinding, (2) peer connection, (3) social and ally support, and (4) access to accurate information. Building on these insights, the hub is now being co-developed with young people, with launch planned for early 2026.

Conclusion:

LGBTQ+ youth from CARM backgrounds are active co-creators of inclusive, culturally responsive services. This project demonstrates the value of engagement, equity-focused practices, and trust-building in co-design, offering lessons for future youth mental health initiatives in diverse suburban contexts.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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