

ENGAGING WITH COMPLEX SYSTEMS EVALUATION OF PEER AND COMMUNITY-LED INTERVENTIONS

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Background:

The health service, community and policy responses to HIV are responding to the largest changes in HIV for decades. These biomedical and epidemiological changes intersect with issues of stigma, social structures and health access, and the outcomes are difficult to predict. Now more than ever, the HIV response needs real time evaluation and insights to guide its response to such evolving developments and the resulting policy and practice shifts.

Peer-led programs for people living with HIV (PLWHIV) have underpinned many of the PLHIV organisations which participate in guiding the overall response. Despite this, peer led programs continue to have limited capacity to demonstrate their role and value as part of a multi-sectoral response.

Methods:

The What Works and Why (W3) Project drew on complex systems approaches to develop a framework for peer-led organisations to demonstrate their role and capture real time insights. We found there were four key functions (Engagement, Alignment, Adaptation, and Influence) which peer-led organisations need to draw on and demonstrate as they interact with complex community and policy systems. This paper will draw on this work and a case study of applying this framework within a peer-led PLHIV organisation.

Results:

We found peer-led programs gained important insights about changing experiences of stigma and experiences of newly diagnosed. Sometimes these were not shared due to: assumptions these were already understood by their organisation; the usefulness and importance of the data to broader sector was not recognised; was not packaged in way that made it influential; or experienced barriers in the sector to engaging with insights from peer led programs.

Conclusion:

The rapid changes being experienced in HIV will present both challenges and opportunities that will test adaptability and effectiveness of the whole response, including peer led programs and leadership. To value peer-led PLHIV programs and the participation of PLHIV, we need to not only invest in strengthening these community systems but also align of the policy system to value and draw on effective peer leadership.

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