

## CULTURAL COMPETENCY IN HIV WORK AND COMMUNITY MOBILISATION

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**Background:** Involvement of affected communities in addressing issues of concern to them is a paramount factor in effectively responding to taboo issue such as Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). Engaging and mobilising Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities to action requires an understanding of the sociocultural and environmental influences affecting the issue and how to navigate the cultural terrain in a safe and respectful way.

Over the last 10 years, PEACE Multicultural Services has worked with CALD communities in South Australia to help them understand the context of HIV in Australia, its impact on their communities, and how to be involved in addressing the associated issues. The work done with African community in South Australia is presented.

**Methods:** A community engagement and capacity building approach was used. The process involved identifying and understanding community structure and dynamics, Identifying pathways to access the community engaging with key stakeholders to gain community's understanding of the issue, develop structures around community stakeholders to support and guide PEACE's program, support community stakeholders to start similar discussions in their communities and create opportunity for PEACE to access their communities.

**Results:** The African community in South Australia shifted from the stage of complete denial of HIV in the community and reluctance to engage to now openly having discussions about HIV, developing resources and campaign to promote safe and respectful relationships and encouraging testing and taking a stand against stigma and discrimination.

**Conclusion:** Changing people's culture, values and perception is a process, which takes time and can be challenging but is worth the effort. Cultural understanding and competency, and committing to the process of change are key elements for success in engaging and mobilising communities to action in addressing issues affecting them.