From Stigma to Strength

Peer Navigation referrals for older gay men:
A collaborative pathway to resilience and wellbeing

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Background / Purpose

In 2024, NSW Ministry of Health provided funding to support a **12-month Peer Navigator** position at Positive Life NSW. The aim was to explore how peer navigation could address not just the HIV-related needs of older gay and bisexual men (GBMSM) living with HIV, but also the **broader issues** that impact quality of life particularly for those from diverse backgrounds.

Outcomes / Impact

Identification of a holistic approach to overall health and wellbeing paradigm:

- Leveraging the lived experience of the Peer Navigator to facilitate trust, empathy, and practical solutions to improve health and wellbeing outcomes
- Focuses on the interconnectedness of physical, mental, and psychosocial elements of quality of life rather than the immediate or perceived needs
- Validation of a **whole-person approach** beyond just clinical needs and navigation of complex health systems which built capacity in older GBMSM to make informed choices to improve their quality of life.

Innovation & Significance

This framework demonstrated that peer navigation extends beyond traditional peer support. It is a **foundational relationship** that bridges gaps between services and individuals, provides system-level support and radically improves quality of life outcomes for older GBMSM living with HIV.

Closing:

The Peer Navigation Program has the capacity to **transform lives** by addressing both the practical and emotional challenges faced by older GBMSM living with HIV—ultimately helping them to age well, be connected, and supported.

Older GBMSM valued being heard and supported as whole people, not just patients/clients living with HIV.

Approach

Many of the older GBMSM living with HIV, were referred from a wide range of services for counselling, social inclusion, or employment support. However, through Positive Life's intake process we discovered **deeper, often hidden challenges**.

A structured Peer Navigation Program framework to contextualise and identify issues that ranged beyond the original referral reasons, to source onward specialist referrals that the Peer Navigator identified included:

- Increasing comorbidities
- Housing insecurity
- Health and government system navigation
- Mental health
- Occupational therapy
- Financial stress
- Migration support
- Cosmetic surgery
- Long-term physical and psychological impacts including torture and trauma.