

Know Your Rights: Outcomes from a peer support and education program to increase legal literacy and reduce harms caused by criminalisation and discriminatory migration policies for PLHIV in Australia

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Background:

Criminalisation and discriminatory visa policy reduce access to healthcare and treatment and cause significant psychosocial harm to migrant people living with HIV (PLHIV) in Australia. This paper reports the evaluation of a legal education and peer support program that aimed to enable migrant PLHIV to navigate regulation and reduce these harms.

Approach:

Six workshops were held with 59 migrant PLHIV in Melbourne, Australia since June 2024. Workshops incorporated peer support and participatory learning with a network of migration lawyers. Content was co-developed with the target group and community legal centres, which included information about obligations related to HIV prevention and disclosure, Australian visas and migration with HIV, accessing specialist legal and migration services, and privacy, confidentiality and discrimination protections. We collected data related to referral, demographics, HIV-related criminalisation anxiety and quality of life, changes in knowledge, and qualitative feedback to guide improvement and assess engagement and impact.

Outcomes:

Participants came from 16 countries, were diverse in gender and sexuality, reported criminalisation anxiety and quality of life similar to nationally representative samples, but much lower knowledge of HIV-related laws. Discriminatory migration policy was the main concern participants had prior to the workshop. Afterwards, participants reported increased knowledge in all workshop content, with larger increases in privacy and confidentiality protections and how to access services. Participants reported an increased sense of hope, reassurance and belonging associated with peer support. 60% of participants were referred to partner legal services.

Innovation and Significance:

Combining peer support with legal and migration education successfully engaged migrant PLHIV with low HIV-related legal literacy, increased knowledge, strengthened access to specialist legal and migrations services, and reduced psychosocial concerns related to criminalisation and quality of life. This approach should be considered elsewhere in Australia and settlings where criminalisation and migration are associated with HIV epidemics to improve health, wellbeing and access to services.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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