

PRACTICE BASED TEMPLATE

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Title: *“Just a hole... in the healthcare system?”* Developing a social marketing strategy to improve survey participation among gender-diverse communities: lessons from New Zealand’s national HIV behavioural surveillance programme

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Background/Purpose:

Gender-diverse populations are underrepresented in HIV behavioural surveillance systems. Gender-diverse individuals sexually mix with gay and bisexual men’s (GBM) higher HIV-prevalence networks and are documented in new HIV diagnoses in New Zealand. However, recent restrictions on LGBTQIA+ targeting in online platforms have made it harder to reach gender-diverse populations, requiring researchers to adapt recruitment strategies to improve inclusion in surveillance.

Approach:

Informed by focus groups that identified barriers in the previous SPOTS22 data collection campaign, we developed a targeted social marketing strategy to improve engagement among gender-diverse populations. In response to reported mistrust and perceived identity erasure in HIV research, the team used tailored, humorous messaging (e.g., “Just a hole in the healthcare system?”), was branded as approachable “friendly nerds,” and engaged in person at Pride events to ‘de-anonymise’ the researchers to build trust. Then, we adopted a visual strategy with trans-symbolic design elements to explicitly signal eligibility, and featured trans-presenting local community members to encourage organic sharing. These strategies were integrated into existing surveillance frameworks through ongoing community consultation to achieve a balance between inclusion and maintaining engagement with the primary GBM population.

Outcomes/Impact:

Participants could select multiple identities. Compared with SPOTS22 (n=3,887), the SPOTS25 survey (n=3,191) showed increases in trans men (3.1% to 7.7%), trans women (0.8% to 3.0%), non-binary (5.7% to 8.1%), queer (16.2% to 20.3%), pansexual (4.9% to 8.2%), and bisexual identities (18.3% to 28.3%), but a decrease in those identifying as gay (78.7% to 67.3%).

Innovation and Significance:

Making surveillance more visibly inclusive improves reach into underrepresented groups and increases sample diversity, and may also extend to adjacent populations even without explicit targeting (bisexual MSM). To avoid unintentionally skewing algorithmic ad delivery and ensure sustained engagement from GBM who remain most affected by HIV, the team developed data-driven targeting and optimisation strategies to respond to these challenges in real time.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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