

# HIV WORK READY, PEERS TACKLING ISOLATION AND UNEMPLOYMENT

## **Authors:**

FRASER, NEIL<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Positive Life NSW*

## **Background/Purpose:**

The HIV Work Ready program was first launched mid-2016 to enable people living with HIV (PLHIV) equitable access to pathways leading to employment. Work is a fundamental part of life and a key social determinant of physical and mental health. Moreover, we know that poverty, discrimination, and social marginalisation are powerful drivers of the HIV epidemic. Accordingly, employment is an essential piece of the coordinated response to HIV.

## **Approach:**

Conservative estimates suggest that approximately 25% of people living with HIV (PLHIV) in NSW are currently unemployed yet potentially employable. PLHIV self-report social inequalities such as unemployment, isolation and poverty as issues that detrimentally affect their quality of life and ability to remain engaged with health services. Our aim is to build PLHIV capacity, increase social engagement and reduce welfare dependency by using a peer support approach.

## **Outcomes/Impact:**

The HIV Work Ready Program has recruited, enrolled and processed 74 PLHIV with 60% self-referred and 40% referred from HIV community outreach teams. The program has had success placing PLHIV in both paid (25%) and unpaid work (23%) as well as enrolled in vocational training qualifications (32%).

## **Innovation and Significance:**

The project identifies and removes barriers for the participant and supports them to be self-directing. Desired outcomes described by the participants are grouped into four common themes: increasing income, re-skilling, pursuing more social connection/meaningful engagement or improved living conditions. Based on the participant's desired outcomes, an action plan is developed in consultation with the project officer. The participants leave their initial meeting with clear and achievable next steps so they can easily recognise progress made towards achieving their goals.

## **Disclosure of Interest Statement (example):**

*The Positive Life NSW HIV Work Ready program development was funded by ViiV Healthcare Positive Action community grant.*