

Starting Out West: Rethinking Multicultural LGBTQ+ Engagement Beyond Gender-Specific Workshop Models in Greater Western Sydney

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Background/Purpose:

While LGBTQ+ and HIV services have effectively engaged inner-city Sydney communities, their benefits have not been shared in Greater Western Sydney (GWS), a highly multicultural region. Limited access to culturally appropriate services and community development has contributed to poorer health outcomes, particularly for multicultural LGBTQ+ communities. Notably, 30% of HIV diagnoses in NSW currently occur within GWS, with little decline over the past decade.

In response, ACON Westie developed Starting Out West (SOW), a peer-led workshop for an all-gender, multicultural cohort focused on building community connections alongside sexual health knowledge.

Approach:

SOW was designed and delivered by LGBTQ+ multicultural staff and facilitators from GWS. Adapted from workshops for inner-city GBQMSM, it was tailored for GWS through an all-gender, multicultural focus – reflecting how local social networks form through cultural connection rather than gender or sexuality. Content and promotion were adapted to be culturally relevant, recognising the role of culture in shaping LGBTQ+ expressions in GWS.

Outcomes/Impact:

Seven workshops were delivered between February 2023 and April 2026, engaging 115 participants, 77.4% of whom were from multicultural backgrounds. Evaluation data (n=69) showed high satisfaction (8.7/10) and high likelihood to recommend (9.1/10). Many participants described meeting other LGBTQ+ multicultural people as a key highlight, with SOW being their first local LGBTQ+ engagement. Ongoing connections with peers and continued engagement with ACON Westie initiatives were observed after workshop attendance, indicating sustained community connection.

Innovation and Significance:

SOW embeds lived experience and intersectional approaches in program design for LGBTQ+ multicultural communities. It aligns with GWS social networks, shaped by cultural connection rather than fixed identity categories. By prioritising connection and belonging, it addresses social isolation as a key barrier to sexual health engagement. Its all-gender, place-based approach leverages these networks to enable shared learning across identities, increasing accessibility and broadening sexual health knowledge for communities often missed by conventional gender-specific models.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.