

BEYOND THE HIV EXCEPTIONALIST/MAINSTREAM BINARY: HOW INTEGRATING GENERALIST SUPPORTS INTO A PEER LED HIV PROGRAM STRENGTHENED (RATHER THAN WEAKENED) ACCESS TO SERVICES FOR PLHIV IN QUEENSLAND

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Background/Purpose:

The debate between HIV exceptionalism and mainstreaming is longstanding, with funding decisions often shaped by arguments about whether HIV support services should remain distinct or be absorbed into broader systems. Many community-based HIV services are funded primarily through health budgets, which are increasingly constrained and tend to prioritise biomedical outcomes. At the same time, the psychosocial and whole-of-life needs of people living with HIV (PLHIV) are growing and cannot be met by health funding alone.

Approach:

Queensland Positive People sought to move beyond the exceptionalist/mainstream binary by creating a third option: integrating mainstream funded (generalist) supports into existing peer-led HIV programs. We diversified our funding and service streams to serve broader communities while still prioritising PLHIV. We ensured alignment with our core organisational values, by prioritising peer employment and HIV competent frontline staff.

Outcomes/Impact:

While there were initial concerns that expanding our focus would dilute our mission as a peer-based organisation, the opposite has occurred. The model has increased access to a broader range of safe, stigma-free service offerings for PLHIV, while also delivering high-quality services to the broader community. By holding a recognised place within mainstream service systems, the organisation is also able to act as a conduit for HIV literacy and stigma reduction in those settings. As such, diversifying funding streams has improved organisational sustainability and reduced reliance on shrinking health budgets.

Innovation and Significance:

This "inside-out" integration offers a practical third option beyond the HIV exceptionalist/mainstream binary. This model may offer a transferable pathway for other community-led HIV organisations seeking to sustain and broaden support for PLHIV in the context of constrained health funding and increasing psychosocial complexity.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

Nothing to disclose.