

Engaging Communities: The Role of Queer Festivals in HIV and Sexual Health Advocacy Efforts

Authors:

Riley M. McGoldrick^{1,2}, Michael Traeger^{3,4}, Hugh Crothers⁵, Katie Gault^{6,7} Brent Allan²

¹ Alfred Health, Melbourne, Australia, ² QThink Consulting, Melbourne, Australia
³ Burnet Institute, Melbourne, Australia, ⁴ School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia, ⁵ Drip Sexual Wellbeing products and content, Melbourne, Australia, ⁶ Neighbourhood Clinic, Melbourne, Australia, ⁷ First Peoples Health and Well-being, Melbourne, Australia

Background/Purpose:

HIV self-testing (HIVST) has been available in Australia since 2018, however uptake remains low. New and innovative ways to deliver sexual health promotion, including increasing community-level awareness of HIVST are needed. We aimed to assess the feasibility and acceptability of delivering sexual health education within a community festival catered toward the queer community.

Approach:

Gaytimes is an annual 3-day, queer music and arts festival in Victoria. We partnered with festival organisers to run two sexual health workshops on-site within the festival. Workshops were facilitated by sexual health clinicians, researchers, and community advocates, and covered topics including HIVST (including a live demonstration), doxycycline post-exposure prophylaxis (doxyPEP), accessing and using HIV PrEP (including on-demand PrEP) and cervical screen self-testing, and included an open-dialogue Q&A session. Workshop attendees were invited to complete an online survey after the festival.

Outcomes/Impact:

Across the two workshops, over 80 people attended, of which 38 completed the survey. All survey respondents were assigned male sex at birth; 5.3% were living with HIV, 79.0% had used PrEP in the past year and 81.6% were Australian-born. Workshop acceptability was high; 84.0% strongly agreed the workshop was interesting and 94.7% strongly agreed that queer festivals were an appropriate setting for sexual health workshops. Most (73.7%) reported learning new information; 50.0% of respondents said they were more likely to use HIVST, with 43.0% more likely to use on-demand PrEP and 82.0% more likely to use doxyPEP.

Innovation and Significance:

Our study illustrates that community-level workshops are an acceptable and successful educational strategy for enhancing awareness and knowledge of various sexual health topics. It suggests a desire and acceptance among LGBTIQ+ community members to participate in educational interventions within informal settings. This model has potential to be replicated at larger events to deliver sexual health promotion within LGBTIQ+ communities.

Disclosures

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