

## PRACTICE BASED TEMPLATE

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### **Beyond the Clinic: Relational Pathways to HIV Engagement Through Peer-Led Cultural Spaces Among Asian Communities in NSW**

#### **Authors:**

Billy Suyapmo<sup>1</sup>, Jane Costello<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Positive Life NSW, Sydney Australia*

#### **Background/Purpose**

While Australia has made advances in HIV prevention and treatment, engagement with care remains inequitable among culturally and linguistically diverse populations. For Asian people living with HIV (PLHIV), engagement is shaped by the interplay of culture, identity, relationships, and familiarity. Cultural norms around health, sexuality, disclosure, alongside language and migration experiences, influence how individuals access and navigate services. Conventional HIV service models structured around clinical or information-based delivery may not fully engage this intersectionality. Approaches that centre culturally familiar practices may offer alternate pathways to facilitate engagement. Kitchen Table Stories (KTS), delivered by Positive Life NSW, was co-designed to understand how peer-led environments facilitate engagement among Asian PLHIV.

#### **Approach**

KTS is delivered through facilitated small-group events in culturally appropriate settings, led by trained Peer Navigators from these backgrounds. Food is intentionally positioned as the medium for engagement, creating a familiar entry point for conversation. The model embeds HIV-related information within informal interactions, centring shared identity, language, and lived experience. Insights and structured participant feedback from three pilot events (n=79) were analysed to identify mechanisms underpinning engagement.

#### **Outcomes/Impact**

Findings indicate that engagement is shaped by three interrelated mechanisms. First, **cultural familiarity**, including recognition of self in others through shared cultural and social identity, reinforced through heritage. Second, **peer-mediated trust** enables open non-judgemental dialogue, supported by lived experience and shared identity. Third, **relational safety** fosters respect and agency, allowing participants to engage at their own pace. These mechanisms were reflected in reported levels of comfort (93%) and perceived safety (88%), alongside increased confidence to engage (92%), indicating early shifts in engagement volition.

#### **Innovation and Significance**

KTS demonstrates how food can function as a culturally meaningful medium for engagement, facilitating peer connection into accessible and relational health communication. This model offers a translational approach to improving engagement among culturally diverse populations experiencing structural and social barriers to healthcare.

**Disclosure of Interest Statement:**

Positive Life NSW recognises with gratitude the effort and passion of the community of people living with HIV in NSW.

*Positive Life NSW received funding from ViiV Healthcare Australia through the Positive Action Community Grant scheme for this pilot program*

The authors declared no conflict of interest.