

Featuring people living with HIV in a public campaign: ensuring transparency, safety, and support in changing to conversation about HIV in Queensland, Australia

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Background/Purpose:

With the lack of visibility, awareness, and contemporary HIV knowledge in Australia, being public about someone's HIV status could lead to experiences of stigma, discrimination, or abuse in social settings, social media, or in the media. Queensland Positive People (QPP) created a targeted campaign, to change the conversation about HIV, by introducing everyday people living with HIV. The 'ambassadors' were featured through vibrant imagery, video, and concise storytelling, on TV, radio, newsprint, social and outdoor media, encouraging self-education through www.qpp.org.au/hi.

Approach:

In line with MIPA/GIPA principles, and to mitigate any potential risk of ambassador stigma/discrimination, a transparent expression of interest process was developed, detailing the overall process, and questions centered around issues that ambassadors might be confronted with. Applications could be completed online or via phone interview with the project coordinator.

Applicants were interviewed by QPP's Life+ team using a bespoke assessment tool. They examined vulnerabilities and experiences of stigma, strengths, and resilience, together with the applicants existing supports. All applicants, regardless of inclusion, were informed of support options. These included check-ins from Peer Navigators, referral to Peer Navigation in their home state/territory, and phone counselling by an independent HIV informed practitioner.

Selection criteria were used to exclude or include applicants, and only then a list was provided to the project team for potential selection. The final ambassadors were chosen by QPP's project team in collaboration with the creative team at Wonderkarma.

Outcomes/Impact:

Using this approach, more than half of the applications were omitted for a variety of reasons, deliberately excluding creative considerations, prioritising the health and safety of all involved.

Innovation and significance:

This project demonstrated that a successful campaign did not have to come at the expense of participant wellbeing. Transparent application processes, independent assessment, and multifaceted support options ensured ambassadors were supported at all levels of involvement, before, during and after the conclusion.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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