

# **Title: Extending the reach of HIV peer services through embedding peer navigators in clinical settings: A qualitative analysis**

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## **Disclosure of Interest Statement**

The Kirby Institute receives funding from the Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing. DM's institutions have received unrestricted research grants and an honorarium from ViiV Healthcare and Gilead Sciences, and he has received honoraria from Gilead Sciences. No pharmaceutical grants were received for this study.

## **Word Count: 299 Words**

## **Background**

Peer navigation assists people living with HIV navigate complex health systems, provides a sense of belonging and inclusion, and offers first-hand perspectives on living with HIV. Peer navigation services are typically accessed through HIV peer organisations. In 2024, Positive Life New South Wales implemented a program extending the reach of their services by embedding HIV peer navigators with lived

experience of HIV in three HIV clinics in Greater Western Sydney. We investigated the impact of this program on HIV service delivery in these clinics.

## **Methods**

Between July 2025 and December 2025, in-depth interviews were conducted with clinic staff (n=6), peer navigators (n=2), and patients who had utilised the in-clinic peer navigation service (n=6). Interviews were analysed thematically.

## **Findings**

In-clinic HIV peer navigation was commonly described by clinic staff and patients as increasing the accessibility of peer services. Firstly, situating peer navigators within the clinic removed physical distance as a barrier to engagement with peer services. This was particularly important given clinics were located a greater distance from peer services compared with inner-metro services. Secondly, in-clinic peer navigation enabled healthcare workers to informally introduce peers and patients within the clinic setting. These informal introductions allowed patients to learn more about the different types of peer services offered before deciding to engage further. Finally, healthcare workers described improved understandings of patient needs and perspectives through peer navigators sharing their own experiences. These perspectives contributed to more holistic approaches to HIV care provision.

## **Conclusion**

Our findings highlight the value of embedding HIV peer navigators within sexual health clinics. In-clinic HIV peer navigators increased accessibility of peer services by reducing geographical barriers and creating informal referral pathways. In-clinic peer navigation complemented and enhanced clinical service delivery by enabling more holistic and person-centred HIV care that was responsive to the lived experiences of people living with HIV.

## **Acknowledgement of Funding:**

The NSW HIV Prevention Research Implementation Science Monitoring (PRISM) Partnership is supported by funding from the National Health and Medical Research Council (GNT2006448 & GNT183295) and the NSW Ministry of Health.