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Maintaining long term and meaningful community and research partnerships by responding to and leveraging system-level enablers, barriers and benefits

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Background

The greater and meaningful involvement of people with HIV/AIDS (GIPA), communities affected by HIV, and their peer organisations are a foundation of the global HIV response. However, peer involvement in research is often limited to consultation for individual projects, rather than long term priority setting and conduct of research. The depth and value of peer organizations' insights for the entire research process are often underutilised. Strategies for meaningful participation are often focused on methodology rather than recognising system level factors and how to overcome them.

Description

For 10 years, and through the COVID19 pandemic, the What Works and Why (W3) Project has sustained a partnership across Australia of 12 peer led organisations and research. The W3 Project partnership co-designed, trialled, refined, and applied a systems framework and tools to demonstrate the role and impact of peer organisations within an overall HIV response, and built a consensus model of practical evaluation indicators. W3 Project required peer staff and researchers to undertake the simultaneous role of drivers, participants, and analysts in the research. To identify learnings for maintaining long term meaningful partnership with peer organisations in research, we drew together the documented insights and experiences of peer staff and researchers throughout the study.

Lessons Learned

Research and peer organisations capacity to maintain meaningful participation can be restricted or enhanced by the systems in which they are embedded. While a strength of peer organisations is their relationships within their communities, this relationship means peer staff are also navigating pressure from marginalization, discrimination, criminalization, and more recently COVID19.

We identified strategies that reduced the influence of these system-level barriers and strengthened enablers to maintain meaningful participation and leadership from peer organisations.

Adapting research methodology to maintain active partnership ensured the research rigour was combined with practical and conceptual considerations, and high community engagement.

Example enablers to overcome systemic barriers included strengthening and demonstrating two-way trust and commitment; sustaining flexibility in research resources and management; and demonstrating the impact of peer leadership to counter system-level stigma.

Conclusions

Maintaining meaningful collaboration with peer organisations requires looking beyond good practice methods to responding to and leveraging system-level enablers, barriers, and benefits..

Disclosure of Interest Statement

This research is a collaborative project funded by the Australian Government Department of Health.



Understanding, demonstrating, and improving the impact of peer work in public health



www.w3framework.org

Since 2013, we have been collaborating with community organisations to improve our understanding of the role and impact of peer-led programs and organisations.

The work resulted in the development of the **What Works and Why (W3) Framework**, which can be used to help peer responses better understand, evaluate, and improve the impact of their work.

See the **W3 Framework website** for the full story and all the resources we developed.



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