

## Living Positive in a time of COVID: “How has HIV prepared you for living in a pandemic?”

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### Background:

2020 is a year like no other as the global community struggles to manage the COVID-19 pandemic, but for people living with HIV (PLHIV), particularly the first generation of PLHIV in Australia, the experience of living through such times is not new. This presentation examines how PLHIV have navigated the pandemic and highlights ongoing support needs.

### Methods:

Living Positive in Queensland (LPQ), is a participatory qualitative longitudinal study that examined ageing in people living long term with HIV. 60 participants, who have completed three annual interviews since 2014, were invited to participate in a fourth interview to explore their experiences of COVID-19.

### Results:

Preliminary thematic analysis identified four common themes. Participants articulated a level of expertise that helped them navigate COVID-19, drawn from the **confidence, knowledge, and skills** gained from living through the HIV epidemic. For many, existing experiences of **social precarity** have been magnified as fragile resources are stretched further. **Social isolation and limited social support** remains a central issue for some participants, with many of the micro-interactions previously used to engage in a social world, interrupted by public health measures. The movement to an online world for many social and health interactions has further magnified the experience of disconnection, particularly for those with limited access or confidence in technology. Finally, **interruptions to the daily routines** many participants use to navigate their lives with HIV has created a return to the uncertainty that characterized the early HIV epidemic.

### Conclusion:

COVID has magnified the strengths and vulnerabilities of many living with HIV and highlights the benefits and limitations of living in a time of enforced social isolation, and the challenges associated with shifting to online interactions. Service providers must be aware of the limitations associated with relying on virtual interactions to provide the support and care PLHIV need.

### Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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