

PANDEMIC PARTNERSHIP – HIV COMMUNITY NURSING AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV DURING COVID-19 AND BEYOND

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Background/Purpose:

The Bolton Clarke HIV Program (BC) and Thorne Harbour Health (THH) have had a formal partnership to provide community-based clinical care and support to people living with HIV (PLHIV) in Melbourne, Australia since 1990. Together BC nurses and THH staff and volunteers support approximately 330 PLHIV with complex needs who are vulnerable and isolated.

Approach:

In March 2020, many services withdrew outreach services completely when the COVID-19 pandemic affected Melbourne. BC and THH drew on their longstanding partnership to develop an action plan to support PLHIV throughout.

The plan included:

- Regular phone contact between the BC HIV nurses and THH Client support staff to discuss personal protective equipment (PPE) requirements, infection prevention and best practices
- Sharing of resources including PPE
- Food deliveries and material aid
- Assistance for clients to access telehealth and face-to-face appointments
- Prioritising those most vulnerable – including refugees and people with mental health issues, homeless clients transferred to hotel accommodation – for support/home visits.
- Strategies to minimise risk (outreach, walking visits)
- Assisting clients who required COVID-19 testing
- Housing support and advice.

Outcomes/Impact:

BC and THH successfully provided continuity of care for 333 clients during COVID-19. Clients were assisted to engage in specialist appointments, to undergo planned procedures and operations, and nursing and home care support continued safely. Two clients were supported through palliative care. We completed numerous National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) applications and NDIS plans started. No client, staff member or volunteer contracted COVID-19. We are now assisting clients to obtain COVID-19 vaccinations.

Innovation and Significance:

Lessons from the HIV response have been integral to the COVID-19 scientific response in Australia. The strong partnership and model of care between BC and THH was rapidly adapted to respond to COVID-19. Our partnership's experience in delivering HIV support enabled us to respond swiftly and effectively to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

Bolton Clarke HIV Program and the Thorne Harbour Health Community Support Program are funded by the DHHS (Victoria). No pharmaceutical grants were received in the development of this study.