

ACON's Multicultural Engagement Plan: Addressing of a divergent epidemic through organisational change

Authors:

Wark T¹, Nguyen L¹, Shehata S¹, Vaughan M¹

¹ACON Health

Background/Purpose:

New South Wales has seen significant declines in HIV notifications among Australian-born gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (GBMSM). However, data has shown little decrease in notifications among overseas-born GBMSM, especially those from East and South-East Asia.

Research and programs addressing this trend have focused on health literacy and access concerns, As opposed to how LGBTQ multicultural people perceive LGBTQ and HIV organisations and the need for cultural and ethnic diversity at all organisational levels to develop effective multicultural HIV responses.

To overcome this gap and understand perceptions of ACON within multicultural communities we conducted an extensive consultation process, which supported the development of *ACON's Multicultural Engagement Plan 2021-2024 (MEP)*.

Approach:

ACON's MEP was led by an internal working group of staff with lived experience and an external advisory panel of experts.

An extensive consultation process was conducted with 55 stakeholders including community members and professionals working in the HIV, LGBTQ, and multicultural sectors. Of the participants, 74% were from a non-Anglo background. In terms of gender, 46% were women, 40% were men and 14% were non-binary. Of the women, 13% were transgender, and of the men, 14% were transgender.

Outcomes/Impact:

Informed by the consultation findings, *ACON's MEP* provides a three-year framework guiding the way we engage with and empower community members, volunteers, and staff from culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse backgrounds. ACON has launched the MEP and appointed a project officer to oversee the implementation of the Plan.

Innovation and Significance:

As opposed to novel and discrete programs and research initiatives, *ACON's MEP* seeks to address the cultural shift required within LGBTQ and HIV spaces, by changing perceptions that ACON is an organisation for white people and working towards cultural and ethnic diversity at all levels of the organisation - which is vitally important to end HIV transmissions for all.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

ACON is funded by NSW Ministry of Health.