

Click and Connect – Peer Support and Safe Sex Messaging for GBQ Men during COVID-19

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Background/Purpose:

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, ACON rapidly developed and delivered a suite of online peer education programs for gay, bisexual and queer (GBQ) men. With our populations physically distancing and being more isolated, ACON's online response focused on creating community connection, in order to effectively promote rapidly changing HIV and sexual health information in the context of the pandemic.

Approach:

Using the online chat program Zoom we ran both forums (90-minutes) and online sessions (60-minutes) and utilising our community connectedness as peers and consulting 24 peer education volunteers, we developed a series of online sessions that required low time commitment. The initial online response focused on wellbeing and guidance around ACON's recommendations on casual sex. As lockdown continued, the program adapted to focus on intimacy and online sexual pleasure.

Outcomes/Impact:

Between April and June 2020, we delivered 9 online sessions (1 in Mandarin) and 2 online forums. 101 GBQ men attended these online sessions from across all of NSW. Evaluation data (n=45) demonstrated that participants were highly satisfied (8.95/10) and valued (8.95/10) the session, and that they would recommend it to other people (8.75/10). Written feedback also demonstrated that the sessions provided vital community connection and a space for peers to share their experiences and strategies for looking after their wellbeing and sexual health during COVID-19.

Innovation and Significance:

By creating an innovative online engagement model that utilised readily available technologies (laptop, webcam, phone) and a community wide increase in video conferencing abilities, we were able to deliver up-to-date HIV, sexual health and COVID-19 information, as well as peer strategies for mental and physical wellbeing to participants across NSW. Moving forward this online model can be used to offer state-wide peer education on HIV and sexual health, whilst also facilitating local connections to health services.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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