Developing an online platform to improve social connections for older adults aging with HIV:

Lessons learned from multi-site discussion groups

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Background and Objective

Presenting problem
Older PLWH age 50+ face unique health challenges and social isolation exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Study objective
Create an online platform to connect older PLWH to:
- community resources,
- service providers, and
- each other.
Today’s Presentation Topic

Lessons learned regarding the technological barriers encountered during the facilitation of focus groups with older PLWH
Methods

The study includes 2 phases:

(1) Formation of a Community Advisory Board (CAB; n=24) of older PLWH from three study sites: Palm Springs, CA, Los Angeles, CA, and Tampa, FL

(2) Conduct virtual focus groups (n=9) to characterize the challenges faced during the pandemic and solicit feedback on developing an online platform

The research team identified cross-cutting themes related to technological barriers encountered while conducting the focus groups.
Community Advisory Board Member Screenshot
CAB Meeting #3 May 2021
Results

- **57** PLWH aged 50-82 years (mean=59.8)
- 17.5% identified as Hispanic or Latino/a/x (n=10)

**Gender Identity**

- Male 78.9% (n=45)
- Female 21.1% (n=12)

**Race**

- White 64.1% (n=35)
- Black/African American 29.8% (n=17)
- Asian 1.8% (n=1)
- American Indian/Alaska Native 1.8% (n=1)
Lessons Learned

- Optimize access to Zoom by providing user-friendly, simple instruction prior to the start of sessions.

- Be flexible with varying internet connectivity and bandwidth issues.
Lessons Learned

Create an alternative approach to incentives.

Use individualized methods of communication to inform and remind participants.
Future Directions

Following the “lessons learned” may help

- facilitate research activities in a virtual setting,
- ease participant and research staff burden, and
- eventually lead to a successful development of the online platform.

These lessons learned can be transferable to other studies that use virtual settings to conduct research activities.