

2ND INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON INFECTIOUS DISEASES AND VIROLOGY

November 14-15, 2025 | London, UK



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Exploring the Perspectives of Older Adults Living with HIV on Virtual Care: Qualitative Study (with an evolving Abstract)

Background

Advances in antiretroviral therapy have increased the life expectancy of individuals living with HIV, leading to a growing aging population with complex health needs. Virtual care has become increasingly important for managing these needs, yet little is known about the perceptions of older adults living with HIV regarding such care.

Objective

This study aims to explore the perspectives of older adults living with HIV on virtual care and geriatric healthcare needs, emphasizing the importance of working with community peer researchers and equitable co-investigators.

Methods

A community-based qualitative study was conducted in Ontario, Canada, employing semi-structured interviews and focus groups with 26 older adults (aged 50+ years) living with HIV. Participants were recruited through quota and purposive sampling to capture a diverse range of experiences. Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis guided by the Qualitative Analysis Guide of Leuven, under the principles of Experience-Based Co-Design. The study was guided by the principles of Experience-Based Co-Design (EBCD), ensuring that lived experiences were central to the research process.

Results

Four key themes emerged: (1) the importance of building relationships in virtual care for older adults with HIV; (2) privacy and confidentiality concerns; (3) challenges and solutions related to access and technological barriers; and (4) the role of social support networks for emotional and practical support. These findings highlight how trust, privacy, technology access, and social support shape perceptions of virtual care and geriatric healthcare needs in this group.

Conclusions

By considering the unique perspectives and needs of older adults living with HIV, healthcare systems can be made more inclusive and responsive. Addressing gaps in geriatric care, reducing stigma, and providing culturally appropriate virtual interventions are essential for fostering a supportive healthcare environment for aging individuals with HIV. Additionally, incorporating lived experiences at all levels of the research ensures that the insights and needs of older adults living with HIV are authentically represented and addressed. The involvement of community peer researchers and equitable co-investigators enriches the research process, ensuring that interventions are grounded in real-world experiences and are more likely to be accepted and effective.