

Ethics & DEI

Refinement and Pilot Testing of an Online Patient Navigation Platform for Enhancing Access to Geriatric and Mental Health Care in Seniors Living with HIV KM Kokorelias, D Valentine, AD Eaton, R Abdelhalim, E Dove, S Donovan, MT Harris, SL Hitzig, L Jamieson, C Morland, SEP Munce, R Parpia, CL Sheppard, MB Wasilewski, R Zewude, A Zhabokritsky, L Sirisegaram, *Gerontechnology* 25(s)

Purpose In 2025, one in six Canadian adults living with HIV were over 50 years old, yet access to specialized geriatric and mental health care remains limited, compounded by medical mistrust and misinformation. This study aimed to address this gap by co-designing an online Patient Navigation Platform (PNP) specifically tailored for seniors living with HIV who seek geriatric and mental health support. The project integrates lived experience insights from seniors themselves to ensure the platform would meet their unique needs, enhance care accessibility, and empower users to navigate complex healthcare systems more effectively. **Method** The purpose was to refine and pilot test a digital PNP designed to enhance access to geriatric and mental health care for seniors living with HIV in Ontario, Canada. A two-phase, community-engaged qualitative study was conducted. Phase 1 included 33 semi-structured interviews with seniors living with HIV to explore experiences and expectations in accessing geriatric and mental health services. Reflexive content analysis identified the key components for the PNP prototype. Phase 2 involved two focus groups with 10 participants to evaluate the prototype's acceptability and usability, developed in collaboration with Citrus Suite, a digital health solutions company. **Results** Preliminary findings from Phase 1 identified key barriers to accessing mental health and geriatric care, including fragmented services, difficulty locating HIV-appropriate resources, and concerns about misinformation. Seniors highlighted the need for personalized guidance, clear communication, and coordinated care. The platform includes one-to-one peer matching, 24/7 messaging, and a directory of local HIV-informed geriatric and mental health services. Phase 2 usability testing indicated that the prototype was well-received, with participants reporting improved clarity in navigating healthcare options, greater confidence in accessing relevant services, and appreciation for the HIV-specific tailoring. Suggested refinements included simplifying navigation menus and enhancing accessibility features to support users with diverse digital literacy levels. **Discussion** This project demonstrates the feasibility and value of co-designing a digital patient navigation tool with seniors living with HIV, addressing both geriatric and mental health care needs. By incorporating user feedback at multiple stages, the PNP prototype reflects the lived experiences and priorities of the target population, fostering engagement, usability, and acceptability. The findings support the potential for online patient navigation solutions to improve health outcomes, self-efficacy, and quality of life for seniors living with HIV. Future work will focus on further refinement, broader implementation, and evaluation of the platform's effectiveness in supporting integrated, equitable, and accessible care for this underserved population.

Keywords: patient navigation, HIV, qualitative, older adults

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