



**Patrons:**  
**Dr. Alice Welbourn**  
**Professor Jane Anderson**  
**Professor Baron Peter Piot**  
**Michelle Brewer - Barrister**

## Project Description:

### **GROWS (Women with HIV Growing Older Wiser and Stronger)**

The GROWS project aims to improve the quality of life of older women with HIV through a tailored, sustainable, holistic project, developed and led by women with HIV for women with HIV, drawing upon the expertise of the four collaborating organizations:

The Sophia Forum, Positively UK, NAM, and University College London (UCL.)

Advances in antiretroviral therapy has meant that the number of women with HIV aged over 50 has tripled in the past 10 years. In London there are 10,649 women with HIV, of which 5,071 are in the 35–49 age group and 4,064 are over 50 (PHE 2019). HIV care for women must therefore address the needs of those in this age group.

Older women with HIV face a number of challenges, including high levels of menopausal symptoms and difficulties accessing appropriate care; increased risk of comorbidities such as osteoporosis and cardiovascular disease; and high levels of stigma. Furthermore, we know that women with HIV are disproportionately affected by mental health issues, and socioeconomic challenges, including poverty, gender-based violence and immigration problems.

The objectives of The GROWS project are to:

- a. Raise awareness of the impact of ageing among women with HIV.
- b. Provide information on HIV and ageing to women with HIV.
- c. Provide holistic support for women around ageing and HIV, and sign-post to relevant services.
- d. Advocate and campaign on specific issues faced by women ageing with HIV.
- e. Facilitate professional development of women with HIV so that they can move out of poverty.

The project will be managed collaboratively by The Sophia Forum and Positively UK who will employ two project workers, in part time roles, to work together to deliver the programme.

The GROWS project has four key components:

#### **1. Development of women and ageing support programme**

- Analysis of existing data from PRIME study and other current research.
- Facilitation of focus groups discussions (FGD) with women with HIV.
- Interviews with key stakeholders, including HIV healthcare providers, commissioners, and voluntary sector professionals.

*Sophia Forum*

Registered Office: 483 Green Lanes  
London N13 4BS

[www.sophiaforum.net](http://www.sophiaforum.net)

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This research will inform the development of a peer-mentor training and intervention manual to support women with HIV aged ≥40 with issues such as menopause management; social isolation; prevention and management of frailty and co-morbidities; intimate partner violence (IPV); and poverty.

## **2. Peer-mentor training and deployment**

- Training of 45 women peer-mentors over three years. They will then be supported to mentor other women with HIV, through Positively UK and Sophia Forum networks, and take referrals from London clinics.
- As part of Sophia Forum established work we also aim to recruit 25 women over 3 years and support and fund them to attain a Level 3 City & Guilds qualification in Education and Training.

## **3. Training the trainers**

- We will refine the training manual to develop a “training the trainers manual”, to enable peer-mentors to train other women who wish to provide support around HIV and ageing.
- We will recruit 20 peer-mentors, over two years, for a two-day “training the trainers” session, following which they will be involved in training other peer-mentors.

## **4. Maximizing impact**

We are committed to sharing lessons and insights from this project, and to raising awareness of issues around HIV and ageing in women, through:

- An advocacy and policy report. Combining findings from the programme evaluation with input from women with HIV, we will produce a report summarising the health, social and economic impacts of ageing in women with HIV and highlighting best practice.
- Report launch - the target audience will be women with HIV, commissioners, healthcare professionals and voluntary sector professionals.
- Throughout the duration of the project we will support co-production of conference abstracts, papers and blogs to share learnings and improve practice and services.

The organizations coordinating the project are:

### **Sophia Forum**

Sophia Forum is a national UK charity which promotes and advocates for the rights, health, welfare and dignity of women living with HIV through research, raising awareness and influencing policy. Its work reaches women with different ethnic, faith and gender identities, sexual orientation, ages, immigration status and relationships with the criminal justice system. It advocates for greater representation of women living with HIV in medical trials, programmes, policy and research, including trans women who are often invisible in the response to HIV and experience far greater intersectional difficulties when accessing healthcare and meaningful engagement in HIV spaces. Recent work has included partnering with the Terrence Higgins Trust to deliver ground-breaking research revealing challenges faced by women living with HIV in the UK. Sophia Forum has also been instrumental in ensuring that women are included in the debate around the availability of Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) and that information specifically tailored to women is available.

<https://sophiaforum.net>

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**Positively UK**

Positively UK provides peer-led support, advocacy and information to everyone living with HIV to effectively manage any aspect of their diagnosis, care and life with HIV. We believe that people living with HIV are best placed to advocate for their own needs: 90% of our staff are living with HIV. Working in partnership with the NHS, our peer work is integrated at 14 clinics across London; We run a range of specialised peer-led support services for women, heterosexual people, gay men, young people, and those ageing with HIV. We offer OCN accredited training to people with HIV to deliver efficient peer support and collaborate with clinics and voluntary organisations around the UK to establish peer support programmes.

[www.positivelyuk.org](http://www.positivelyuk.org)

**NAM**

NAM works to change lives by sharing information about HIV and AIDS. We believe that wherever you are in the world, having independent, clear and accurate information is vital in the fight against HIV and AIDS. We provide information to people to ensure their decisions are informed by an up to date evidence base and best practice. We strive to reach greater and more diverse audiences and to ensure that our information resources are accessible to them.

[www.aidsmap.org](http://www.aidsmap.org)

**University College London (UCL)**

University College London's Institute for Global Health provides a unique, cross-disciplinary approach to research and teaching in global public health. We work in the real world, collaborating with communities at all levels, and offer workable solutions for policy makers. Equality, diversity and inclusion are central to our approach.

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