

ONGOING AND SURGE MPOX HEALTH PROMOTION MESSAGING

22 December 2025

Overview

Australia's mpox response to date demonstrates that non-stigmatising, agency-affirming health promotion is most effective when led by the communities most affected. Community organisations, supported by government, clinical, and research partners, are best placed to translate evolving information into clear and culturally appropriate messaging. This policy brief outlines the key features and considerations needed to sustain effective ongoing communication and to rapidly scale health promotion messaging during mpox outbreak surges.

Context

Australia's response to the 2022 and 2024 mpox outbreaks was highly effective, supported by close collaboration across governments, researchers, clinicians and community-led organisations. HIV and LGBTIQ+ community organisations in particular, brought decades of experience delivering non-stigmatising, harm-reduction-focused sexual health messaging. Their longstanding HIV infrastructure enabled rapid translation of emerging mpox evidence into culturally appropriate, trusted communication for their communities (1)(2).

This work was strengthened by coordinated governance structures such as the mpox subcommittee of the Blood Borne Viruses and Sexually Transmissible Infections Standing Committee, which brought together state and federal health departments, clinical stakeholders and community organisations to align advice nationally (2). Together, these partnerships reflected an effective model: community organisations with highly specialised knowledge of their communities leading messaging design and delivery, supported by government and clinical partners for resourcing, coordination and technical expertise.

A strong example of this model was the mpox health promotion campaign delivered through the Emen8 platform, a collaboration between ACON and Thorne Harbour Health (Figure 1). Funded by the Australian Government Department of Health, the campaign demonstrated community-led design paired with government resourcing and support. Rolled out across social media and hook-up apps, it provided accessible, non-stigmatising information on mpox symptoms, vaccination and risk-reduction strategies for the GBMSM community (3).

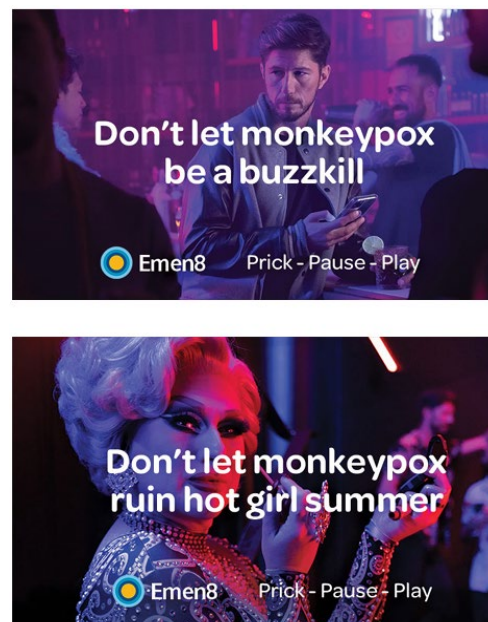


Figure 1: Emen8 mpox campaign (3).

Key Features of Effective Mpox Messaging

To ensure health promotion messaging remains effective now and during surge outbreaks, the following features are essential:

- 1. Community-led development and delivery**

Community organisations hold a level of trust and authority in their communities that governments cannot match and hence should remain the primary leaders of mpox messaging. Their deep connection with LGBTIQ+ communities provides essential insight into emerging issues, ensures messaging is culturally appropriate and relevant, and supports rapid feedback loops when circumstances change.

- 2. Clear, accurate and actionable information**

Ensure messaging integrates clinical, epidemiological and research expertise. Messaging should describe symptoms, transmission, testing, vaccination, and personal risk-reduction strategies in concise, practical terms.

3. **Non-stigmatising, inclusive language**

Lessons from the HIV response have illustrated how stigma deters key populations from engaging with health services (2). Communication must avoid blame, stereotypes or insinuations that reinforce prejudice. Messaging should support dignity, respect and safety for affected communities.

4. **Promotion of personal agency**

Messaging should empower individuals to make informed decisions about their own sexual health (4). This includes recognising autonomy and ensuring that people have the necessary information to evaluate and choose among realistic risk-reduction options.

5. **Sex-positive, harm-reduction-focused framing**

Sex-positive, harm reduction messaging is essential. Messaging that emphasises adaptable sexual behaviour options is more effective than abstinence-only or vaccine-only approaches and helps avoid inadvertently devaluing or deprioritising healthy LGBTIQ+ sexuality (5).

Access to Online Health Promotion Messaging

Digital platforms play a critical role in sexual-health promotion because they offer anonymity, privacy and accessibility allowing individuals to engage with sensitive or stigmatised topics without fear of judgement. Online environments also act as important spaces for reflection, assessment and community connection, enabling people to navigate sexual-health decisions in ways that suit their personal contexts (6). Restricting or limiting access to these spaces can undermine sexual health literacy and reduce people's ability to make informed choices. However, current content-moderation systems frequently misclassify or suppress sexual-health material targeted at LGBTIQ+ communities, due to algorithms lacking nuance and nudity-detection tools that encourage overcapture and are biased toward heteronormative standards (7). Ensuring equitable access to these digital spaces is essential for maintaining an effective mpox response.

To maintain consistent access to vital, accurate mpox messaging online:

- **Promote efforts to remove inappropriate content restrictions**, particularly in public settings such as libraries, community centres or shared devices where sexual health information may be blocked despite its educational and public health value.

- **Be aware of ways to overcome and/or reduce the risk of algorithmic suppression or shadowbanning**, which disproportionately affects LGBTIQ+ sexual health content and limits the visibility of essential public health messaging.
- **Support and maintain a surge-ready digital infrastructure**, with capacity for rapid updates, high user traffic and distribution across multiple channels including websites, apps and social media, during outbreak surges.

Ongoing and Surge Readiness

Health promotion messaging should remain active between outbreaks to maintain baseline awareness and trust, while being able to scale rapidly during surges. Stable and sufficient funding for community organisations is essential to expand messaging during outbreaks without compromising other critical programs, ensuring they can mobilise quickly and effectively.

Preparing Messaging for the Broader Community

Although mpox has primarily affected GBMSM in Australia, future outbreaks may occur in additional populations. Governments should proactively prepare parallel, sector-specific messaging tailored to heterosexual populations, families and children to ensure outbreak readiness. More detailed information can be found in the next policy brief – “Preparing Messaging for Mpox Cases in the Broader Community”.

References

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