

Making Rights Real – Turning Inclusion into Practice in Papua New Guinea’s HIV Response

In Papua New Guinea, the people most affected by HIV face the greatest barriers to care. In 2025 alone, the country recorded an estimated 11,000 new HIV infections. Men who have sex with men, transgender people and sex workers have some of the highest rates of new HIV infection and the lowest access to prevention and testing. Women living with HIV and people from these communities who also have a disability face even greater barriers to care. Stigma, criminalisation and discrimination stand between them and the services they need. The Key Populations Advocacy Consortium (KPAC) brings six national organisations together so that the communities most affected by HIV can act collectively, share resources and speak with one voice.

After years of collaborating with KPAC on other programming, Health Equity Matters formalised its relationship with the consortium in 2024, in time to help address the HIV crisis declared in 2025. Through forums, partnerships and consultations with the communities most at risk and people with lived experience, the two organisations identified priorities for national coordination, peer-led services and advocacy. Early relationships with the disability organisations Callan Services, Cheshire Homes and the PNG Assembly of Persons with Disability are now creating an entry point for disability inclusion in community-led HIV work.

‘Inclusion is not just a principle, it’s power. When key populations living with disability or without disability are free from stigma and discrimination, they can access HIV services with dignity, and communities move closer to true equality.’

– Brenda Lombange, Community-Led Monitoring Program Coordinator, KPAC

By the end of 2025, KPAC had adopted its first safeguarding policy and its first policy on gender equality, disability and social inclusion, embedding those protections in how the consortium works. Transgender leaders from Hetura, women leaders from Friends Frangipani and Women Affected by HIV/AIDS, and youth representatives from Youth Lead Rise are now among those who help shape KPAC’s decisions and carry those perspectives into national HIV coordination.

Communities that were once talked about are now shaping how Papua New Guinea responds to HIV. Continued funding means Health Equity Matters can help more of them reach that position, so services and policies are built around the people who depend on them.