

## **Testing for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in Addiction Services: reducing barriers to access for priority populations.**

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### **Background:**

Aotearoa New Zealand has high rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Māori and Pasifika communities are among those disproportionately affected. People who use drugs, particularly those engaged with addiction services, face multiple barriers to STI screening, including stigma, lack of trust in mainstream services, and competing health needs. This pilot explored the feasibility and acceptability of point-of-care (POC) syphilis, HIV, and Hepatitis C testing embedded in a Community Drugs and Alcohol Service.

### **Description of Model of Care/Intervention:**

Between November 2024 and March 2025, Body Positive, an HIV non-governmental organisation, offered peer-led POC Syphilis, HIV, and Hepatitis C testing through a weekly drop-in session at an urban addiction service in Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland. Participants received a \$20 supermarket voucher as an incentive. In addition, self-collected STI swabs and/or urine samples were offered for chlamydia and gonorrhoea testing as per NZ STI management guidelines. These samples were processed through the Auckland Sexual Health Service.

### **Effectiveness/Acceptability/Implementation:**

A total of 159 participants completed tests. The sample included 114 males (mean age 38) and 45 females (mean age 41). Māori clients represented 34% (n=54), Pasifika 5% (n=7), European 27% (n=43) and Indian 23% (n=38). Importantly, 53% of participants reported testing for the first time.

**Conclusion and Next Steps:** This pilot highlights the effectiveness of delivering peer-led, incentivised STI and bloodborne virus (BBV) screening within addiction services. High participation from Māori and first-time testers suggests this model can improve access to sexual health services for populations historically underserved by mainstream healthcare.

### **Implications for Practice or Policy:**

Integrating syphilis, HIV and Hep C screening into harm reduction environments is a practical strategy to reduce barriers, promote early detection, and address growing inequities in sexual health outcomes in Aotearoa. Future efforts should explore scale-up and integration with broader STI and BBV testing pathways.

**Disclosure of Interest Statement:** This pilot was conducted in collaboration with Body Positive Inc, who provided peer facilitation and financial incentives. The authors have not financial or personal conflict of interest to disclose.