

# **‘IT’S LIKE THE BLIND LEADING THE BLIND’: EXPLORING THE REPRODUCTIVE AND SEXUAL HEALTH OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN AUSTRALIA**

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**Background:** International students are important contributors to the Australian education sector and economy. Little is known about the reproductive and sexual health (RSH) of this growing population, including their understanding and experience of Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC). This study aimed to explore international students’ understanding of their OSHC, their RSH knowledge, and access to RSH services.

**Methods:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with international students from universities in Melbourne, Australia. Students were recruited through flyers on a university campus and a state government-funded international student service, international student magazines, posts on student Facebook pages, and through snowball sampling. Thematic analysis was used to identify key themes emerging from the transcripts.

**Results:** Twenty international students from 11 countries were interviewed. International students reported limited RSH knowledge, low levels of awareness about OSHC restrictions, and challenges navigating their insurance in a foreign healthcare system. Students desired better sign posting of the inclusions and exclusions of their OSHC and how to access RSH services. International students described differing levels of interest and comfort engaging with RSH information, highlighting the value of using multiple educational strategies to improve RSH knowledge.

**Conclusion:** A greater collective effort is needed from universities, government, and OSHC providers to effectively and consistently provide international students with the knowledge, skills, and services to improve their RSH. The strategies voiced by international students provide key recommendations for enhancing the health and wellbeing of this priority population. Health promotion strategies included: developing personal skills by educational institutions providing students with comprehensive relationships and sexuality education using multiple media throughout their degree; developing better documentation for international students about how to access RSH services; and building healthy public policy by implementing changes to ensure coverage of pregnancy-related services.

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