

HIV self-test vending machines attract high proportions of never previously tested and overseas born clients

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Background:

NSW Health's HIV self-test vending machine (VM) project 'MyTest' distributes free HIV self-tests through vending machines in Inner-Sydney, Greater-Western Sydney, and regional NSW. The project aims to increase HIV testing, particularly among at risk populations, such as overseas-born and never-previously-tested people.

Methods:

Between May-2024 and February-2026, MyTest registration data and HIV self-test dispensing data were collected online during client registration and self-test ordering from the 13 available vending machines. We use chi-square tests to assess differences in country of birth, self-test order location, testing history and repeat ordering.

Results:

One or more HIV self-tests were ordered by 2331 clients at sex on premises venues (SOPV, 3 VMs, 35.3%), universities (3 VMs, 25.8%), health facilities (3 VMs, 16.7%), social venues (2 VMs, 16.5%) and community services (2 VMs, 5.7%). Almost half (45.9%) had never previously tested for HIV. Never-testers were more likely to order their first test at a university (35.3% vs 17.3%), and less likely from an SOPV (26.7% vs 47.0%) or social venue (14.8% vs 20.2%; $p < 0.001$ for each). Never-testers were less likely to order a test more than once compared to those previously tested (19.1% vs 22.9%; $p = 0.032$). Compared to Australian-born clients, overseas-born clients (62.0% overall) were more likely to order their first test at an SOPV (38.9% vs 34.9%), and less likely from a health facility (11.5% vs 16.4%) or community service (5.2% vs 6.9%; $p = 0.001$ for each). Overseas-born clients were more likely to order a test more than once compared to Australian-born clients (23.2% vs 18.5%; $p = 0.010$).

Conclusion:

HIV self-tests distributed through vending machines attracted a high proportion of people never previously tested, and who were overseas-born. High uptake at SOPVs and universities, including by overseas-born clients and never-testers, respectively, highlight vending machine locations where coverage could be expanded to increase access to self-testing.

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