Building digital and data capability for Australian sexual health workforces

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Background:
The Australian Digital Health Agency's 2020 National Digital Health Capability Action Plan (CAP) proposes a new approach to embedding digital technologies and practices within Australian healthcare settings. This paper presents findings from first stage of a 4-year, interdisciplinary project that aims to support digital capability-building within the domains of sexual health. We map current definitions of digital and data literacy within Australian sexual health research and practice.

Methods:
Utilising a social sciences narrative literature review methodology (Lupton, 2021), we developed both a summary of key findings, and a deeper understanding of extant literature defining and discussing 'digital literacy', 'digital health literacy' and 'data literacy' in the context of sexual health. Review findings were contexualised via 30 semi-structured interviews with local and international researchers, clinicians and health promotion practitioners.

Results:
Where 'digital literacy' and 'digital health literacy' are discussed within sexual health research, they most often framed in terms of deficits, and attributed to individual health consumers. This contrasts with contemporary considerations of 'health literacy' which adopt a more wholistic view. 'Data' was seldom mentioned in the literature surveyed. However, interviewees were more likely to understand both digital and data literacy as necessary capabilities for sexual health consumers and practitioners alike.

Conclusion:
CAP calls for a significant upskilling of both current and future health workforces with respect to digital and data literacies and capabilities over the next decade. Our research suggests that while there has, to date, been little consideration of what this might look like in the domain of sexual health, there is an emergent engagement with – and appetite for- an expansion of digital and data capability in this sector.