

Nurses at the Frontline: Scaling Up STI Screening Through Walk-in Urgent Care Clinics

Authors:

CHERIE BENNETT ^{1,2,3}, ELIZABETH BATES ⁴, ALEXANDRA LIPA ¹

¹ ASHM Health, Sydney, Australia, ² Sydney Sexual Health Centre, Sydney, Australia, ³ The Kirby Institute, UNSW, Sydney, Australia and ⁴ Walk-in Centres, Canberra Health Services, Canberra, ACT, Australia.

Background/Purpose:

Chlamydia remains Australia's most frequently notified STI, with 109,451 cases in 2023 half among those aged 20–29. As many STIs are asymptomatic, timely and accessible screening is essential. The ACT's nurse-led Walk-in Centres (WiCs), serving over 132,000 patients annually, are well positioned to provide such care. Yet a June 2024 audit found that only 2.5% of 555 clients aged 15–29 received opportunistic STI screening highlighting missed opportunities. While some training existed, limited workforce capacity constrained delivery of comprehensive sexual health education. This initiative aimed to build nurses' confidence and capability through tailored training aligned to their full scope of practice.

Approach:

ASHM, in collaboration with WiC Clinical Nurse Educators, co-designed a one-day training program to integrate STI screening into urgent care workflows. Delivered across two days to maximise attendance, training covered sexual history-taking, STI screening, inclusive care, and case-based learning. WiC educators co-facilitated sessions to reinforce local protocols and quality improvement strategies.

Outcomes/Impact:

The 2024 pilot trained 34 nurses. Post-training data showed:

- Sexual history-taking during UTI presentations rose from 68% to 76%
- 300% increase in opportunistic testing offers since July 2024
- 100% of participants reported their learning needs were met

Innovation and Significance:

Access to primary healthcare remains a national challenge particularly for young people. In 2023–24, nearly 30% of Australians aged 15+ delayed or avoided seeing a GP, citing cost and wait times. This initiative provided a timely, scalable model of nurse-led STI screening, addressing both healthcare access and missed preventive opportunities. It highlights how nurse-specific education, supported by structural integration, can strengthen primary care responses to sexual health aligning with national efforts to optimise the nursing workforce.

Disclosure of Interest Statement

This activity is supported by ACT Health Directorate