

## Promoting sex-positive approaches to sexual health to address STIs in young people

### Authors:

Reeves K<sup>1</sup>, Shaw M<sup>1</sup>, Andrews, S<sup>1</sup> Rendell, A<sup>1</sup>, Hilton, J<sup>1</sup>, Wheeler, S<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>WAAC

**Background:** In Western Australia, young people aged 15 to 29 years account for the majority of chlamydia and gonorrhoea notifications (71% and 53% respectively in 2023). During this period the gonorrhoea notification rate increased by 42% compared to 2022, with notifications among the 20 to 29 years age group increasing by 50%. Whilst testing and treatment options are widely available and highly effective, the often-asymptomatic nature of these infections may cause delay in diagnosis. A campaign was developed to encourage regular sexually transmissible infection (STI) testing and use of prevention methods among people aged 20 to 29 years in WA, utilising a sex positive and peer-informed approach. The campaign aimed to: (1) increase STI testing; (2) increase awareness of gonorrhoea transmission and symptoms; (3) increase knowledge of STI prevention methods; (4) increase uptake of STI testing; (5) address barriers to STI testing among this population.

**Approach:** Several strategies were identified to provide a comprehensive approach. Young people were consulted through campaign development to ensure acceptability. Partnerships with a national Podcast (Big Small Talk), social media influencer (Tim Collins) and a Perth based peer organisation of youth sexual health educators (the YEP Project) were created, to develop online campaign assets. Content was developed for social media and a webpage providing credible information reviewed by a Nurse Practitioner. Moreover, a workforce development webinar was held to reach regional primary care providers, discussing the state of play of STIs among young people in WA, opportunistic testing, and campaign launch.

**Outcome:** At time of abstract submission, the campaign is still being implemented. At cessation of the campaign, evaluation data will be analysed and reported against the aims. Preliminary data suggests acceptability of a sex positive approach to encourage STI testing among the target group. Further, a national Podcast program contacted WAAC for further advertising.

**Innovation and Significance:** Preliminary findings of this campaign suggest sex positive approaches to sexual health are acceptable and effective in delivering health promotion messaging. Data and learnings will be used to inform future strategies for sexual health promotion targeting youth in WA.

**Disclosure of Interest Statement:** WAAC is funded by the WA Health, Sexual Health and Blood-Borne Virus Program.