

## PRACTICE BASED TEMPLATE

Submissions must not exceed 300 words (excluding title & authors). The document **must not** be password protected or saved as read only as this may result in your abstract failing to upload successfully. Use Arial 12 point type only. Please structure your submission using the subheadings below. If the abstract does not fit the headings, please put full abstract beneath introduction and we will remove the headings once submitted.

## **INSERT TITLE HERE: AN INTEGRATIVE APPROACH TO IMPROVING SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH LITERACY FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS: A CROSS SECTORAL COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVE**

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### **Background/Purpose:**

NSW's international student population continues to grow post-COVID, with 328,518 students enrolled in 2024. This Medicare-ineligible population face distinct sexual and reproductive health (SRH) challenges, including limited SRH knowledge and poorer SRH outcomes. Cultural stigma, unfamiliarity with Australia's healthcare system, concerns around confidentiality and cost often deter engagement in SRH services. While initiatives including the co-designed [International Student Health Hub](#) (ISHH) website, and the Sexual Health Peer Education Program (SHAPE) provide accessible information and capacity-building, their separate operation has limited system-wide impact. An integrated, culturally responsive approach is essential to improve awareness, service linkage and SRH outcomes for international students.

### **Approach:**

Sydney Local Health District, in partnership with the NSW Multicultural HIV and Hepatitis Service (MHAHS), implemented a localised, multi-level health promotion model for international students. This approach integrates student engagement initiatives with Cultural Support Workers, tailored resource development, and expanded SHAPE content covering broader SRH topics alongside ISHH promotion. Following a finalist recognition in the 2024 NSW Health Awards, this approach is now being scaled statewide by MHAHS across Greater Western Sydney and regional and rural Local Health Districts. This approach strengthens partnerships between health services and education and student service providers, to more effectively meet international student health needs.

### **Outcomes/Impact:**

Since 2024, the program has engaged 3,962 international students and trained 86 peer workers across eleven settings, increasing health literacy from 71% to 94%. Implementation across universities, TAFE, and private student housing demonstrates strong reach and transferability. Workforce capacity building has

embedded health promotion within services, improving access to resources and navigation support.

**Innovation and Significance:**

This integrated approach builds SRH literacy and system navigation skills, fostering long-term positive health-seeking behaviours. Peer-led and culturally responsive strategies enhance accessibility and acceptability. Expansion is underway to address broader student well-being priorities, including mental health and nutrition.

**Disclosure of Interest Statement:** none.