

HEALTH HEROES: FIGHTING SYPHILIS THROUGH EDUTAINMENT FOR ABORIGINAL YOUTH

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Background/Purpose:

In Western Australia (WA), infectious and congenital syphilis disproportionately impacts Aboriginal people. Awareness of syphilis and the importance of testing remains low, particularly amongst young Aboriginal people and Aboriginal pregnant people. Existing syphilis health promotion campaigns and resources targeting Aboriginal youth have utilised infographic-style digital and print media such as social media tiles, videos, and posters. Despite considerable efforts to raise awareness, transmission is continuing to rise.

Approach:

This campaign is a collaboration between the Aboriginal Health Council of WA and Indigiverse, a First Nations creative marketing agency. Co-designed with Aboriginal youth, healthcare workers and cultural leaders, the campaign utilises education-entertainment in the form of comic-style outputs to disseminate syphilis information in a youth-friendly, culturally centred and digestible way. The project addresses how shame is a barrier to accessing prevention and testing. The messaging highlights the importance of community support in normalising safer sex practices. The campaign outputs include a comic book, an app, social media resources, merchandise and other outputs displayed in targeted public settings. Outputs are also localised to different regions.

Outcomes/Impact:

Health Heroes syphilis campaign will commence delivery in May 2026. The campaign aims to increase awareness of syphilis, reduce stigma and increase testing amongst Aboriginal youth in WA. Campaign outputs will be distributed within Aboriginal community-controlled health services (ACCHS), other stakeholders and nationally. Evaluation will be captured through campaign engagement and surveying ACCHS and Aboriginal communities.

Innovation and Significance:

Distinctly different from existing syphilis campaigns, especially those targeting Aboriginal youth; The Health Heroes Campaign uses entertainment as an avenue to deliver syphilis education using a 'Trojan horse' style approach. Through co-design and the collaboration between two Aboriginal organisations, Aboriginal voices have been centred throughout project planning, delivery and evaluation.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

The Aboriginal Health Council of WA and Indigiverse are funded by WA Health Department.