

Experiences of sexual health testing: Findings from qualitative interviews with Western Australian young people.

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Background:

Young peoples' motivations to access sexual health care, along with their experiences of sexual health testing are important considerations for health policy and service delivery. Previous research has suggested that stigma, cost, and practitioner judgement may lead young people to delay accessing testing services for sexually transmitted infections (STIs). However, the Western Australian context is not well understood. As young people are identified as a key priority group in national and state STI strategies, it is important to understand how youth have experienced sexual health testing, and to seek their recommendations for service optimisation.

Methods:

Qualitative interviews were conducted with young people aged 18 to 25, living in the Perth metropolitan area. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, or through a video conferencing modality. Thematic analysis was conducted on interview transcripts to identify common themes and subthemes, with NVivo software used to code and manage the data.

Results:

Eighteen interviews (6 cisgender male, 12 cisgender female; 10 heterosexual, 8 other sexual orientation) were conducted. Five overall themes were identified that addressed both positive and negative experiences of testing, and motivations to access STI-related services. Participants provided insight into how service delivery could be improved or streamlined. This included the expansion of telehealth sexual health services, the co-location of practitioners and pathology collection services, use of text-based annual reminders, and changes to the way test results were communicated.

Conclusion:

These findings provide insight into how Western Australian young people have experienced sexual health testing, and what factors motivate them to access services. Changes to STI-related services, informed by youth perspectives, should be implemented to increase testing rates and to ensure contemporary, high-quality care for this priority population. Future research efforts should focus on repeated cross-sectional data collection and targeted efforts to understand the possibly unique perspectives of youth based in regional areas.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

None.