

## **Preventing congenital syphilis through patient-centered care**

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### **Background:**

Victoria has experienced an upsurge in infectious syphilis cases in women over the last few years, and congenital syphilis has re-emerged with 12 cases notified since 2017. A comprehensive public health response has been implemented and includes the state-wide Syphilis in Pregnancy Project (SIPP) aiming to prevent congenital syphilis among women at high risk. This paper describes the experience with implementing SIPP and preliminary evaluation results following 18 months of operation.

### **Methods:**

SIPP has a dedicated 0.4 FTE nurse within the Department of Health Contact Tracers Team. All cases of syphilis in pregnant women notified to the department and identified as high risk were referred to SIPP for follow-up. SIPP provided support for women including assistance with partner notification, booking appointments, food vouchers, transport, and home visits. SIPP provided advice to clinicians, and care coordination liaising with multiple clinical and support services to ensure that women remained engaged in care. In-depth case review identified individual risk factors and health systems issues and informed service improvement and the broader public health response.

### **Results:**

From July 2020 to December 2021, 45 women were referred to SIPP. Individual risk factors identified included: drug and alcohol use, mental illness, homelessness, unemployment, domestic violence, and lack of Medicare access.

Health system issues that could have resulted in adverse outcomes for women and babies included: limited awareness among clinicians resulting in incomplete or delayed treatment, multiple service providers and lack of care coordination and case-follow-up, insufficient testing at delivery, babies lost to specialist follow-up.

All 45 women receiving SIPP assistance completed treatment during pregnancy and there were no congenital syphilis cases in this cohort.

### **Conclusion:**

SIPP project has been very successful in averting congenital syphilis in a cohort of women at high-risk through patient-centered support and improved care coordination.

### **Disclosure of Interest Statement:**

Note