

DEVELOPMENT OF A PILOT REGISTER FOR SYPHILIS TESTING AND TREATMENT IN VICTORIA

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Background/Purpose:

The number of syphilis notifications reported to the Victorian Department of Health has steadily increased over the last decade. Infectious syphilis cases notified this year to date (YTD; at 02/05/2023) had exceeded 2022 YTD numbers by 30%. Males represent the largest number of notified cases statewide; however, shifts in transmission networks have resulted in more infections among sub-groups not previously considered to be 'at-risk', including heterosexual men and females of reproductive age. Infection rates remain much higher among Aboriginal Victorians compared to the non-Aboriginal population.

Approach:

To facilitate the surveillance and reduction of syphilis transmission in Victoria, the Department has produced the state's first pilot of an enhanced syphilis case management register. The register houses comprehensive and clinically relevant testing and treatment data for syphilis infections across the state's entire population. Further to describing the current epidemiology of syphilis in Victoria, the proposed presentation will detail issues considered, challenges encountered, steps taken, and deliverables completed during the register's development.

Outcomes/Impact:

Significant outcomes were derived from consultations with key stakeholders (e.g., relevant frontline service providers in both metropolitan and rural settings such as sexual health nurses, Aboriginal healthcare workers and infectious disease physicians). Key regulatory and privacy impact issues were considered. Microsoft Azure Databricks was chosen as the platform for the pilot product. The back-end register and the user interface were developed to most efficiently present data of clinical relevance for appropriate management of syphilis cases in Victoria.

Innovation and significance:

The development of a pilot register for syphilis is highly relevant to communicable disease policy and practice in Australia. Crucially, it will be valuable in informing the design and implementation of similar systems for syphilis and other conditions by other Australian agencies and jurisdictions.

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