

THE CHANGING EPIDEMIOLOGY OF SYPHILIS IN VICTORIA AND THE STATE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE: VICTORIA'S FIRST SYPHILIS PUBLIC HEALTH ACTION PLAN 2024–26 ('THE PLAN')

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Background/Purpose: Syphilis continues to surge across Australia. This presentation will outline a) the changing epidemiology of syphilis statewide, and b) the Victorian government's policy and practice response; specifically, the development and progress of the recently-launched Syphilis Action Plan.

Epidemiology: Over the last decade (2014–2023), the rate of infectious and late syphilis cases in Victoria nearly doubled from 1396 to 2777 per 100,000 population. Of particular concern is rising notifications among heterosexual men and women of reproductive age and the resultant re-emergence of congenital syphilis (four cases in 2023 – the highest annual number in Victoria to date).

Response approach: The Plan's development comprised a cross-sector consultative approach. Other relevant jurisdictional plans and strategies were reviewed. A gap analysis of current Victorian syphilis/STI-related responses was undertaken. A Steering Committee and dedicated Working Groups – comprising key stakeholders and experts from frontline services, peer organisations, academia and government – inform, monitor and drive the Plan's implementation.

Outcomes/Impact: Targeted actions address syphilis among certain priority populations, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, women of reproductive age, men who have sex with men (MSM), culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and justice health-engaged people. Statewide targets the plan is working towards for 2030 include re-eliminating congenital syphilis, reducing the overall prevalence of syphilis (vs 2019), and increasing syphilis testing and treatment among priority populations. Overarching themes focus on: improving antenatal and postnatal care and education; increasing testing, treatment and partner notification; increasing community engagement and health promotion; supporting workforce development and capacity building; and, facilitating research, surveillance and timely reporting.

Innovation and significance: This is Victoria's first Syphilis Public Health Action. Outlining the Plan, its development and early outcomes will assist the health sector and other jurisdictions in addressing syphilis in local contexts and facilitate the development of consistent measures of success Australia-wide.

Disclosure of interest: None.