

## PRACTICE BASED TEMPLATE

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### **Thoughtful and Thorough: a case for comprehensive contact tracing in a syphilis outbreak**

#### **Authors:**

Grace Phua<sup>1</sup>, Jedda Tyson<sup>1</sup>, Naomi Nelson<sup>1</sup>, Caroline McMahon<sup>1</sup>, Ellie Darcey<sup>1</sup>, Suzanne McEvoy<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Boorloo (Perth) Public Health Unit, Western Australia*

#### **Background/Purpose:**

In the last two decades, Australia has experienced a resurgence in infectious syphilis as well as cases of congenital syphilis. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been severely impacted in both infectious syphilis and congenital syphilis. Other priority populations that experience increased burden of disease include people experiencing homelessness and people who use drugs. Dedicated resourcing is required to address the spread of syphilis and prevent congenital syphilis.

#### **Approach:**

In 2020, the Chief Health Officer of Western Australia authorised a state-wide public health response for infectious syphilis. Boorloo Public Health Unit (PHU) subsequently established a dedicated and multidisciplinary Syphilis Response Team (SRT) comprising nursing, midwifery, medical, epidemiologic and Aboriginal health expertise. This team is resourced to carry out comprehensive case follow-up, including thorough contact tracing in priority populations.

#### **Outcomes/Impact:**

A de-identified case study will be presented to highlight the:

- Complexities of contact tracing. The case study will demonstrate the way people already experiencing health disparities are affected by syphilis. Whilst there can be challenges associated with follow up, the SRT has innovated solutions to meet the needs of priority populations.
- Significant gains associated with thorough contact tracing, including prevention of congenital syphilis.
- Positive outcomes associated with embedding Aboriginal health workers in the SRT.
- Strength of collaborative approaches. The SRT has built networks with other health service providers, resulting in more streamlined care for cases and contacts.

#### **Innovation and Significance:**

Syphilis was declared a Communicable Disease Incident of National Significance in 2025 in the hopes that efforts to stop its spread can be intensified and coordinated. The practice of the SRT at Boorloo PHU is illustrative of what intensified and coordinated efforts can achieve. Sustained resourcing of this nature across the nation will be impactful in reducing the rates of infectious syphilis and eliminating congenital syphilis.

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

None declared