

Bridging Trust and Access: A Student-Led Digital Navigation Model for Sexual and Reproductive Health Among International Students in Victoria, Australia

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Background/Purpose:

International students in Australia face persistent barriers in accessing sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services, including fragmented health systems, limited understanding of Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC), financial constraints, and concerns around confidentiality. Even where free or subsidised services exist, utilisation is often limited due to unclear navigation, low trust, and fear of disclosure. This project aimed to develop and evaluate a student-led digital platform to improve navigation of accessible, low-cost, and anonymous SRH services for international students in Victoria.

Approach:

SafeDownUnder is a student-led public health initiative co-designed with international students to centralise navigation across SRH, mental health, and OSHC systems. The platform connects users to trusted, affordable, and, where possible, anonymous service pathways across health, community, and consular systems. A Student Advisory Board (SAB) was engaged throughout conceptualisation, design, and refinement; members were compensated for their ongoing involvement, enabling sustained and equitable participation. Prototype testing was conducted with international students (n=56) using structured feedback tools to assess usability, accessibility, and perceived relevance.

Outcomes/Impact:

The initiative engaged over 1,500 international students through outreach and partnership activities, with prototype testing conducted among 56 users to evaluate usability and relevance. User testing demonstrated high acceptability of the platform, with the majority of participants reporting the website was easy to navigate, accessible, and relevant to their needs. Findings suggest strong potential for real-world engagement by reducing navigation complexity and improving clarity of available services. Feedback highlighted the importance of culturally informed, student-led design in enhancing trust and perceived safety, particularly where confidentiality concerns may limit service utilisation.

Innovation and Significance:

This project presents a student-led, co-designed digital navigation model that addresses structural barriers to SRH access by prioritising trust, anonymity, and affordability. By acting as a bridge across fragmented systems, the platform supports informed help-seeking and highlights underutilised service pathways. The model is scalable and transferable, offering a practical approach for improving equitable access to SRH services among international and other mobile populations.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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