

RESEARCH BASED TEMPLATE

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Community acceptability of STI-X – the rural Victorian STI vending machine pilot

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Background:

Sexually transmissible infection (STI) rates continue to rise across Australian rural and regional areas. Innovative solutions such as vending machines can improve access by providing a testing option that provides privacy and convenience.

Community reference groups (CRGs) were assembled to support an STI test vending machine pilot (STI-X) for 12 months across eight regional locations in Victoria. The vending machines were situated in public areas where consumers could obtain a test kit for chlamydia, gonorrhoea and HIV, collect their specimen, and post the kit to a laboratory.

Methods:

Participants were recruited from CRG members, community members, and vending machine users. Recruitment was undertaken via digital flyers, targeted email distribution and strategically placed posters in community settings. Machine users received a QR code inside each kit linking to an anonymous survey to provide details for study participation. Participants took part in face-to-face interviews either in a small groups or individually. The focus groups used a semi-structured interview schedule containing 6-12 questions. Verbatim interview transcripts were coded by a multidisciplinary research team using crosscoding/multiple coding methods. Data were analysed using a combined deductive/inductive approach whereby themes were derived from literature, the research questions and interview schedule, and inductively from emergent and recurrent themes arising from the data.

Results:

STI-X was deemed an acceptable option for increasing access to STI testing. Professionals supported this additional option for individuals who may not use standard healthcare pathways. They identified the vending machines were easy to use; however, better communication was needed to enhance uptake. Therefore, utilising community-driven promotional approaches are necessary to ensure information on novel health initiatives reaches intended audiences.

Conclusion:

STI testing vending machines have proved feasible and acceptable to professionals and users in rural and regional Australian communities.

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Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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