

Implementing Mini Clinical Audits to Increase STI Screening and Testing in Primary Care

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Background



Australia continues to see an increase in notifications of sexually transmissible infections (STIs), affecting multiple population groups.

Syphilis has been declared a Communicable Disease Incident of National Significance³, and there have been increases in infectious syphilis, congenital syphilis and neurosyphilis cases in most jurisdictions, and an ongoing multi-jurisdictional outbreak predominantly in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities¹.

In 2025, there have been **4,067** cases of infectious syphilis, including **11** cases of congenital syphilis², four of which have led to infant deaths³.

Health departments have identified the need to increase STI testing to curb increasing notification rates⁴.

Approach

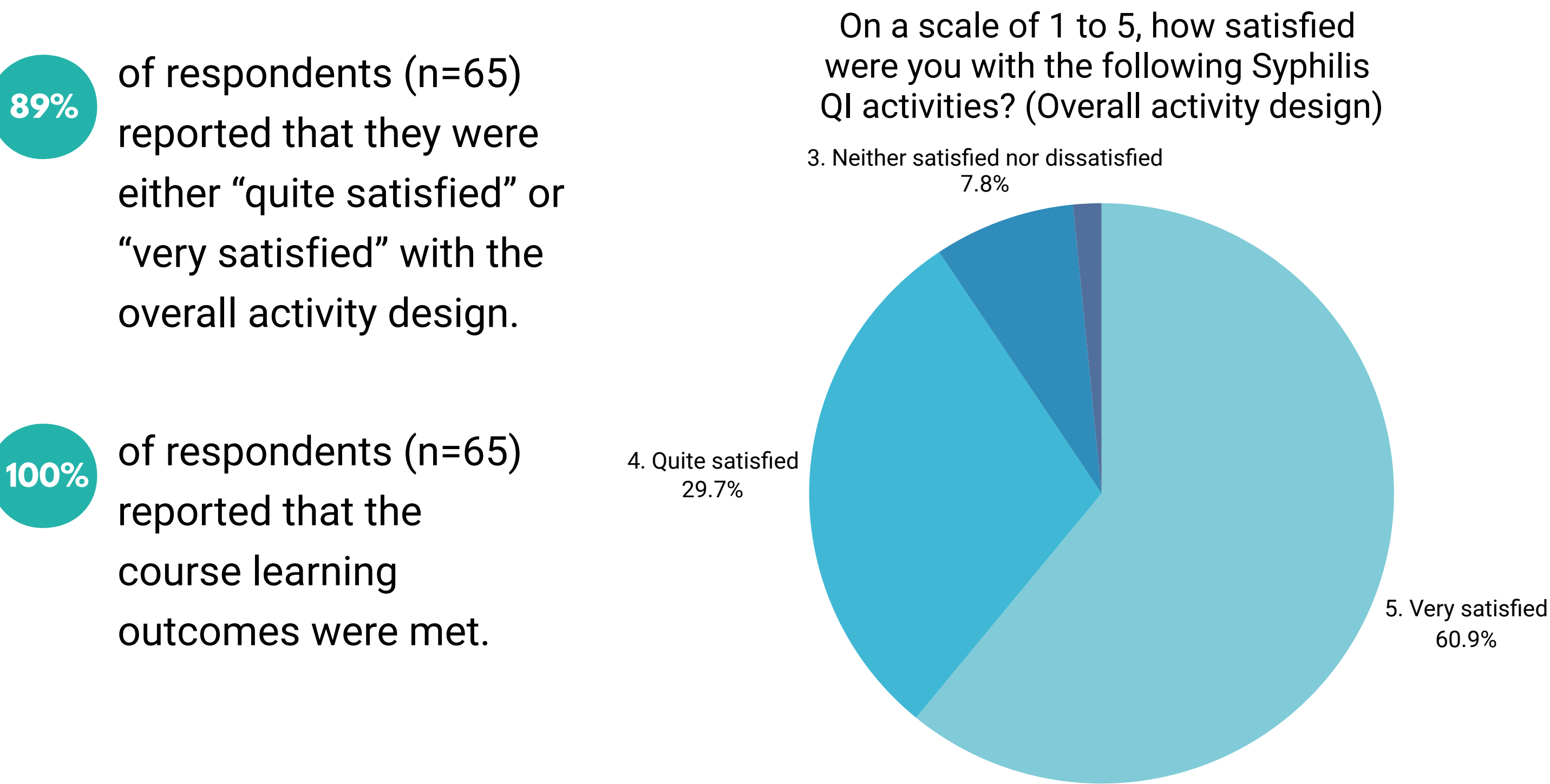
To support health professionals to increase testing, ASHM collaborated with SA Health to develop a Mini Clinical Audit on STI Screening and Management in General Practice. The audit aims to support clinicians to complete guideline-based STI testing and management in their practice and accurately record patient data. Clinicians complete the following components:

- 1 ASHM's Sexual Health Fundamentals Online Learning Module
- 2 Review the STI Management Guidelines for Use in Primary Care
- 3 Use the Auditing Tool, developing a quality improvement plan and undertaking reflection and education activities

ASHM also collaborated with South Eastern Sydney Local Health District (SESLHD) to develop a Mini Clinical Audit on increasing syphilis screening. The SESLHD audit included additional resources to educate clinicians on how to accurately complete NSW Health Syphilis Notification Forms following a syphilis diagnosis.

Outcomes

45 and 20 participants completed the SA Health and SESLHD audits and completed the post-audit survey, respectively (n=65). Of both surveys,



A thematic analysis of the qualitative survey responses indicated the following results.

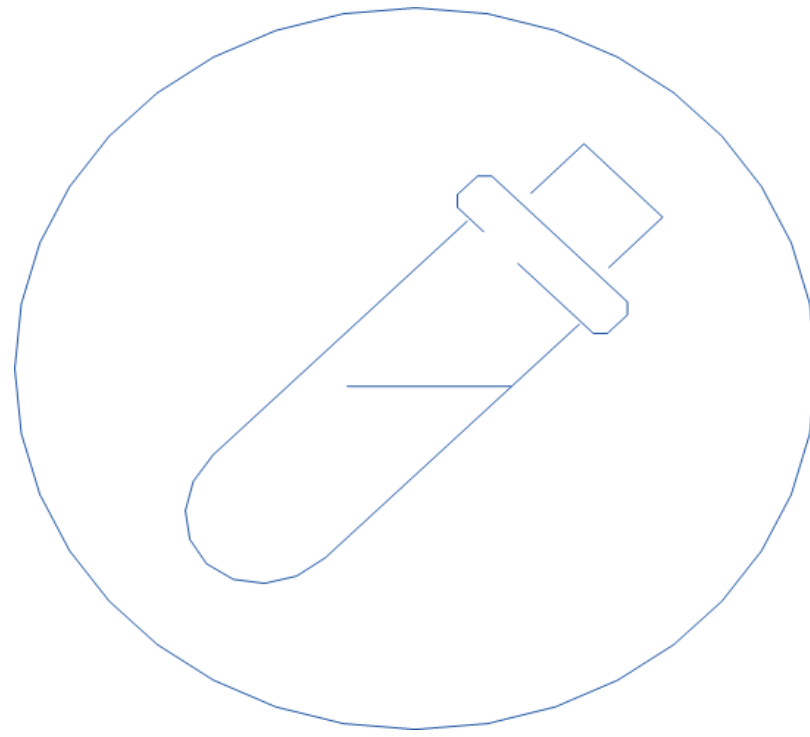
- 25%

of respondents (n=65) reported that the auditing tool was "informative."
- 20%

of participants (n=65) stated that they would either screen or test more patients.
- 86%

of participants (n=65) stated that they would recommend this CPD activity to a colleague.
- 22%

of participants of the SA audit (n=45) reported that they would be more proactive in taking a more extensive sexual history from patients.



Innovation and Significance

The audits supported clinicians to comprehensively screen for STIs and provide appropriate STI management. Audit participants self-reported positive changes in awareness about STI and syphilis screening and management. 18% of participants of the SA audit (n=45) stated that they would implement checklists and templates to support sexual health history taking.

According to observations from SESLHD Public Health Unit staff, the response rate to syphilis notification forms, and the accuracy of staging and treatment has improved over time. The audit, along with other SESLHD initiatives supporting GPs in managing syphilis, may have contributed to these positive trends.

These preliminary responses suggest that audits are an effective format for STI education as they allow for reflective practice which contributes to continuous evidence-based learning and clinical decision-making improvements.

Audits are an attractive form of continuous professional development (CPD) for clinicians, as they enable clinicians to claim Measuring Outcomes CPD hours, which can otherwise be more difficult to attain.



Scan here to access ASHM's SA Health Mini Clinical Audit - **STI Screening and Management in General Practice**

ashm.org.au/education/mini-clinical-audit-sexually-transmissible-infections-sti-screening-and-management-in-general-practice/



Scan here to access ASHM's **South Eastern Sydney LHD Mini Clinical Audit**

ashm.org.au/education/south-eastern-sydney-lhd-mini-audit-increasing-syphilis-screening-in-your-practice/

References

Australian Government, Department of Health and Aged Care, 'Multijurisdictional Syphilis Outbreak Surveillance Report: February 2021 (2021)', <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/multijurisdictional-syphilis-outbreak-mjso-surveillance-report-february-2021>, accessed 11 August 2025.

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Kidd, M., Chief Medical Officer's statement declaring syphilis a Communicable Disease Incident of National Significance [media release] (7 August 2025), <https://www.health.gov.au/news/cmo-statement-syphilis-cdins?language=en>, accessed 11 August 2025.

New South Wales Ministry of Health, 'NSW Sexually Transmissible Infections Strategy 2022-2026: Data Report (2021)', <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/Reports/Publications/sti/nsw-2021-sti-report.pdf>, accessed 11 August 2025.