

CONNECT: TESTING THE UNTESTED

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Background/Purpose:

Accessible testing is integral to the timely diagnosis and treatment of HIV and the virtual elimination of HIV transmission in Australia by 2030. WHO recommends HIV self-testing (HIVST) as an innovative approach to address barriers to regular HIV testing, in particular those experienced by key populations from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. We evaluated the community acceptability, uptake and efficacy of vending machines on university campuses to dispense free HIVSTs and encourage testing amongst infrequent and non-testers from priority populations including men who have sex with men (MSM) and international students.

Approach:

Six vending machines were installed at three universities and one sex on premises venue (SOPV) across Adelaide. User demographics and usage patterns, data from Google Analytics, and responses to online questionnaires were analysed throughout the pilot. A Culturally Advisory Group comprised of members from priority populations advised on all aspects of the project.

Outcomes/Impact:

2195 people registered to use CONNECT and 2733 kits were dispensed over 22 months. 53% of CONNECT users were overseas-born and 39% from one of 19 Asian countries. Overseas-born users came from 99 countries. 64% of CONNECT registrants were naïve testers. Users who identified as gay or bisexual were almost twice as likely to access more than one kit, and to be repeat users. There were three reported reactive test results and in each case linkage to confirmatory testing and care was provided.

Innovation and Significance:

The CONNECT pilot demonstrates that vending machines dispensing free HIVSTs are an effective means of engaging non- and infrequent testers and people from priority populations in HIV testing and linkage to care.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

No pharmaceutical grants were received in the development of this study
