



# Young Aboriginal people's engagement with STI testing in the Northern Territory, Australia

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# Urgent need...

**...to understand how earlier, more frequent engagement in regular STI testing can be achieved among young Aboriginal women and men in regional and remote Australian settings**

- higher rates of STIs among young Aboriginal people (15-29 years) than non-Indigenous young people, and in regional and remote areas
- persistently high STI prevalence and incidence rates irrespective of services, programs and policies
- behavioural surveys and epidemiological research illustrates that STI testing and retesting after STI treatment is less common among younger people aged 16-19 years, particularly young men

# To reduce STIs and enhance engagement...

**...in clinic-based STI testing among young Aboriginal people, our findings illustrate the importance of:**

- strong family and community support for health service use
- youth-friendly (re)design of health service spaces and appointment procedures
- innovative sexual health outreach programs

# Qualitative...

**...study examining young  
Aboriginal people's  
perceptions of factors  
influencing uptake of clinic-  
based STI testing**

- Two remote settings in the Northern Territory during 2015-17
- In-depth interviews with 35 young Aboriginal men and women aged 16-21

**SOCIO-  
ECOLOGICAL  
ANALYSIS**

**STRENGTHS-  
BASED  
APPROACH**

# Strong social support...

...for young women's use of local health services for STI testing

**For us mob, like, for [women], we get all the [women] to come down 'n' sit down 'n' talk story about women's you know?  
... *If one of your friends thought they might have a (sexual) sickness, what would you say to them or tell them to do?***

**Ah I would just help them, take her down to the clinic. I'll help her. If she woulda had that sickness for a long time, she woulda come up to me and tell me, 'I'm really scared but I want you to help me, to take me down clinic'. 'cause I know she wouldn't go herself to the clinic and she'll feel really shame.  
(17 year old woman)**

# Health service provision...

**...strategies by male health workers in community settings  
beneficial for young men**

**He [remote men's health outreach worker] used to come every day to clinic and he used to show all the healthy stuff to the fellas and he used to pick up all the fellas and take 'em to the clinic.**

*So do you remember the things that he taught you?*

**...if you have sex with all the girls you got to go to clinic to have a check... you gotta use safety things [condoms]. He used to talk... after that we used to eat them sausage at BBQ.**

*There were lot, lots of young fellas that, that went?*

**Yeah lots of young fellas and big fellas and old mans. All together. We used to always to go to the hospital and he used to talk like healthy stuff**

**(16 year-old young man)**

# Personal strategies...

...used by young men to enhance access to STI testing

**People feel shame as they might see someone there [at clinic]. They might ask him “hey what’s wrong you come to clinic?” He might get shame. Yeah. But he can say “I got, I got sick”. And pretend that it’s just other, something else. “I got sore ears”. [laughs]. Make it up.  
(18 year-old man)**

# Social constraints...

**...described by young people discouraged their use of clinic-based STI testing**

**...but lead to identification of action in relation to:**

- service redesign
- communications skills

*Might people go and get help, or go and get treatment?*

**If they're game enough, but I doubt it because they'll be scared that they'll get caught out. Unless they talk to their parents about it first.**

*How might they get caught out?*

**Might get seen going to the clinic and then asked question after question after question until it slips out and you tell them by accident. Or if there's nothing wrong with you, it just looks really suspicious.**

*(young man, aged 16)*



# Significance of findings

Persistence of high STI prevalence and incidence rates that occur in hyperendemic settings such as the NT indicates that new strategies are needed to engage young people in STI testing:

- Improvement dependent on high population coverage of regular repeat STI testing and earlier detection of infection and follow up
- Most STI testing occurs through opportunistic screening, reliant on health seeking behaviours and safe, trustworthy clinic environments for clients
- Challenges engaging young men and women in clinic-based STI testing

Value of working with Aboriginal young people and community members as experts on their own lives and community-led identification of health improvement

# THANKS!

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