Purpose of the annual report:
This Annual Report has been prepared by the Centre for Excellence in Rural Sexual Health (CERSH) to inform our supporters, partners, collaborators, and other interested parties of the activities undertaken in 2021 and from January to June 2022.

This report is also a requirement as stipulated in the service agreement between the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services and The University of Melbourne.
The Centre for Excellence in Rural Sexual Health (CERSH) are proud to share their accomplishments for 2021 to June 2022 in this Annual Report. Throughout this period and across various initiatives, much was achieved to ensure the improvement of rural Victorians access to quality sexual and reproductive health care, information, and support. After an unpredictable year in 2020 and early 2021, the team had high expectations for what was to be achieved moving forward and slowly welcomed familiar practices of face-to-face meetings and networking.

A key highlight in 2021, was the successful development and introduction of the four-year subject for enrolled University of Melbourne medical students, “Sexual Health Across Clinical Contexts”. In addition to securing 18% of the first year medical student cohort, a third of the students completing the course were based at rural campuses across Victoria. Through this course CERSH demonstrate their dedication to knowledge sharing and educating upcoming practitioners on effective sexual health practices for rural Victorians.

In lieu of the usual face-to-face bi-annual conference, CERSH hosted a virtual Professional Development Day for sexual and reproductive health industry professionals. The day included six sessions from various professionals within the sexual and reproductive health network. Each of these presentations had a shared aim of increasing knowledge, skills, and capacity of the workforce.

With the welcomed return to normal networking practices, CERSH connected various sexual and reproductive health workers in Mildura by leading improvement discussions through the Sunraysia Syphilis project, Mildura Sexual Wellness Action Planning Workshop, and community consultation with the Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council.

In addition to new initiatives being implemented, CERSH were able to achieve successful outcomes through repeat campaigns like ‘STI Testing Week’ and the marketing of the CERSH online learning modules. The ‘STI Testing Week’ campaign was able to reach over 30,000 rural Victorians through effective social media marketing. The CERSH online modules had record participant numbers and post learning evaluations. CERSH also continued their extensive collaboration in National research projects.

After achieving much in 2021 to June 2022, CERSH will continue to consult and collaborate with service providers and organisations to ensure a needs-based approach to the training offerings and resources created. The team will remain focused on enabling and encouraging the rural workforce to increase capacity and skill development in sexual and reproductive health.

With a direct and motivated approach to achieving success at the beginning of 2021, CERSH were able to accomplish more than planned in promoting the innovation and education of rural sexual health across Victoria.
**KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2020**

- Developed and introduced a four-year subject for enrolled University of Melbourne (UoM) students titled “Sexual Health Across Clinical Contexts”.
- Had 18% of first year UoM medical students select the subject from a choice of 7 others.
- Connected sexual health workers representing 29 organisations and 15 local government areas through our virtual sexual health network meetings.
- Hosting 108 participants at our first virtual CERSH Professional Development Day.
- Had over 30,000 rural Victorians actively engage in the 2021 STI Testing Week social media campaign, by clicking through to the Better Health website to find out more.
- Motivated to improve sexual health in the Mildura region by leading the Sunraysia Syphilis Project, Mildura Sexual Wellness Action Planning Workshop and community consultation with Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council (SMECC).
- Launch of ‘The busy youth workers guide to talking sexual health’.
- Leading the effort to replace numerous vandalized or damaged condom vending machines across the Bendigo, Shepparton, Buloke and Alpine Shire regions, to continue providing 24/7 access to low-cost condoms to regional Victorians.
- Continued extensive collaboration in national research projects.
Vision
The vision of the Centre for Excellence in Rural Sexual Health (CERSH) is that all rural Victorians have access to quality sexual and reproductive health care, information and support that is tailored to their individual needs. CERSH continues to develop sustainable strategies by building collaborations and partnerships between agencies, services and individuals to achieve our vision.

Purpose and Priorities
The purpose of the Centre is to design, implement and evaluate programs that provide practical solutions for the improvement of sexual and reproductive health in both the Hume and Loddon Mallee Department of Health and Human Services regions in rural Victoria. In achieving this, the Centre’s priority areas are focused on:

RURAL WORKFORCE
Support workforce (health, education, youth, local council, pharmacy, university medical students) capacity to promote ‘respectful, safe sexual relationships and reproductive choices’.

Support clinical workforce and interagency capacity to focus on and deliver STI/BBV prevention, testing, management and care to priority populations.

Build knowledge dissemination strategies using information and communications technology to ensure rural workers access to resources.

AFFORDABLE REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH
Continue partnership work with a range of organisations and practitioners, (both local and statewide), to improve:

- access to contraception and early medical abortion (EMA) services,
- quality of support (empathy, privacy, discretion) for women in Hume and Loddon Mallee regions

Collaborate with statewide services and Primary Health Networks (PHNs) to provide locally based training for health practitioners, health and community workers.

Provide practical follow up support and advocacy to establish local EMA service models.

Support the rural workforce to promote community awareness of EMA availability.

LEADERSHIP, RESEARCH, EVALUATION AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING
Provide rural and regional sexual health leadership through participation in state-wide, National and International collaborations.

Provide consultation and support to other rural regions wanting to replicate successful CERSH initiatives.

Research to understand the systems, stakeholders and contexts that play a role in contributing to the sexual health of rural Victorians, with particular focus on priority groups.

Evaluate / review sexual health promotion strategies in rural Victoria.

Provide systems that promote efforts to collect and share data, knowledge and resources to maximise collective impact.
Report from the Director

It is my pleasure to present this 2021 - 2022 Annual Report of CERSH, which covers our activity from January 2021 to June 2022; as we realigned our reporting timelines with all other funded agencies in our sector in Victoria. We started 2021 full of hope for the unhindered availability and expected efficacy of the COVID-19 vaccines.

We have not been disappointed by our infectious diseases colleagues who have worked tirelessly to create safe and effective vaccines which have helped the entire world create a plan and pathway of recovery from the pandemic, albeit with many challenges still to face along the way. Throughout 2021 and 2022, I think that the CERSH team have continued to demonstrate enormous resilience and tenacity as we slowly moved some of our work back into the ‘real world’ whilst maintaining the options and gains we have made in the virtual world.

Our work takes us across many geographies and sectors and focuses on health promotion, STI and BBV prevention, research, clinical teaching and strengthening the rural workforce and health systems. In 2021/2022 our team continued to maintain our existing partnerships, both with rural and statewide organisations and individuals. I’d like to take this opportunity to thank most sincerely all of our partners and collaborators, without whom none of our work would be possible. Their contribution is also highlighted in this report and the successes reported here are attributable to a large number of people and organisations throughout regional Victoria and Melbourne.

To the CERSH team, new and old members alike, I would like to say a huge congratulations for your combined efforts and offer my sincerest thanks for your continued determination and dedication to our work. This Annual Report contains an overview of the work we achieved together with our partners and collaborators and is a credit to you all.

You will see that our team, like others in our sector, was responsive to the needs of our communities and colleagues and we were able to make a meaningful contribution to the delivery of services, the development of policy, teaching of students and health professionals and contemporary research in sexual and reproductive health throughout regional Victoria and beyond.

Professor Jane Tomnay
Director, Centre of Excellence in Rural Sexual Health (CERSH)
CERSH is funded by the Department of Health Victoria through a service agreement with the University of Melbourne. CERSH is situated at the Department of Rural Health, in the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences at Shepparton, Parkville and Wangaratta campuses. CERSH has also established a location of activity within the Loddon Mallee region based at the School of Rural Health, La Trobe University, Bendigo Campus.

CERSH continues to maintain strong day to day partnerships and collaborations with key agencies, networks and individuals within the Hume and Loddon Mallee regions and commits to meeting the reporting responsibilities and requirements set out by the Department of Health Victoria and The University of Melbourne. Standard financial reporting processes of the University of Melbourne are adhered to and reports are provided to the Department of Health in line with the service agreement.
CERSH STAFF IN 2021/2022

Director: Professor Jane Tomnay
Senior Health Promotion Manager: Kylie Stephens (extended leave throughout the reporting period)
Sexual Health Physician/Senior Lecturer: Dr. Siobhan Bourke
Senior Health Promotion Manager – Hume Region: Dr Dave Evans
Senior Health Promotion Manager – Loddon Mallee region: Anne-Marie Kelly
Sexual Health and Wellbeing Project Officer – Loddon Mallee region: Ashleigh Colquhoun
Sexual Health and Wellbeing Project Officer – Loddon Mallee region: Dr Sourav Jain
Sexual Health and Wellbeing Project Officer – Hume region: Ben Corio
CERSH Centre Coordinator: Johanna Kyriakou
Interim CERSH Centre Coordinator: Suzanne Rutherford
MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

The CERSH monthly newsletter continued to be a successful mode of communication in 2021 and 2022, with over nearly 1300 participants receiving a monthly update.

Over many years, CERSH has extended its network beyond northern Victoria to many stakeholders and interested parties throughout the state and across the country through regular communication in the monthly newsletter. However, with the network that was amassed through the newsletter, we realised there were some professionals who were reading the newsletter, but not routinely engaging in networking opportunities and training.

In December 2021 we updated the database that received the newsletter to include two new fields, Region and LGA. This allowed the CERSH team to find these professionals and highlight places in our geographical area where there was limited engagement with any of our approaches.

While the work to address this is only in the beginning stages, we now have a dataset that we can truly use to maximise our saturation of sexual health support and networking opportunities.

As with many things, the newsletter competes with updates from various providers, so for 2022 we trialled a slightly new look to make it easier for different professionals to jump straight to the information that was most relevant to them if they had limited time to engage. This was welcomed with an increase in readership that we hope to carry on into the future.

Sign up to our CERSH newsletter HERE

OUR WORK IN 2021/2022

Priority Area: Rural Workforce Capacity and Development

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Sign up to our CERSH newsletter HERE
MELBOURNE MEDICAL SCHOOL: DOCTOR OF MEDICINE
DISCOVERY SUBJECT

A CERSH-designed Sexual Health subject is the first to be introduced to an Australian Medical Degree

In an Australian first, CERSH in 2021 developed a four-year subject for enrolled medical students titled; Sexual Health Across Clinical Contexts. The re-design of the University of Melbourne’s Medical Degree (MD) allows students some subject choice over the 4-year post-graduate course. Our subject is designed to be taken by choice for just the 1st year, up to and including the entire 4 years and is the first time in Australia that a sexual health care subject is embedded throughout all years of a medical degree.

The CERSH team’s 8-year teaching involvement within the MD program equipped us with an in-depth knowledge of the core curriculum. The four-year sexual and reproductive health course addresses the identified gaps in Sexual Health Care education and focuses on the clinical and practical aspects that doctors require to provide good sexual health care. The topics covered focus on the importance of effective and sensitive communication, particularly in the context of providing such health care in rural communities, and the obstacles and stigma both practitioners and patients can encounter.

The course was designed during 2021 and commenced delivery at the start of 2022 and has proved popular in its first year—18% of first year medical students (total = 62) selecting it from a choice of 7 subjects, and with a third of those students based at rural campuses.

The course content has also been enlightening to many urban-based students, highlighting potential barriers some patients experience in seeking supportive health care in rural communities.

The focus on effectual sexual history taking, and the historical impact of stigma on STI epidemiology and care has produced some stimulating class conversations and ensured an excellent standard of submitted coursework by our first year students. They have had the opportunity to reflect on their own practice and perspectives and communicate that in a range of media modalities as part of the final assessment. They have submitted assessment pieces in written, audio, video, artwork and poster formats.

At the commencement of the course, 86% of students said they were not confident in taking a sexual history. At the midway course evaluations, this had improved to 87% of students stating they were confident in undertaking this process, and subsequently 94% had reached this confidence by course completion. Likewise, only 20% of students were confident that they knew what good sexual health care was prior to the course. By midway, this had increased to 74%, and then to 100% by the end of the course.

Plans are well underway for continuing the Sexual Health Across Clinical Contexts subject across two-degree year levels in 2023 (first and second years), with most first-year students in 2022 indicating that they wish to continue their studies in this field into the second year of their MD studies in 2023.
Check out some of the student feedback:

Highlighting the face to face small group learning was appreciated and different to just listening to lectures for learning.

“Really great discussions about how to approach sexual health, great to hear people different ways of addressing questions (pronouns, inclusive language, sensitive topics like DV)”.  
– Module Participant

“Tutorials were the clear highlight. They were engaging and developed a real skill in history taking. The lectures were interesting, but you could tell people weren't as engaged. The lectures felt a little like fun extras, whilst the tutorials felt very essential”.  
– Module Participant

Support of lectures and no exams!

“I really enjoyed the lectures and felt as there isn't an exam it meant I could actually sit there, take in and appreciate the information being given to us rather than frantically trying to write down everything the lecturer said”.  
– Module Participant

General feeling at the end.

“Just great to break down the barriers to communication when it comes to sexual health, have to nip the awkwardness in the bud by meeting up all together and getting used to talking about this stuff. Also my tutor was brilliant at bringing in personal and practical stories which help to make the content more human”.  
– Module Participant

“Overall, absolutely loved it. I cannot speak highly enough of the communications tutorials, both from an academic learning perspective as well as an immensely clinically useful experience”.  
– Module Participant

Source: BClinins MDJ 2022, submitted coursework, Sexual Health Across Clinical Contexts.
CERSH ARE COMMITTED TO PROVIDING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR THE SEXUAL HEALTH WORKFORCE.

Facets of Rural Sexual Health – Online Education Modules

2021 saw a continuation of the CERSH online modules success with over 300 participants enrolling throughout the year and up until June 2022. With the most current version of modules uploaded to the CANVAS platform in early 2021, participants were able to develop their knowledge and skill base regarding sexual health in a rural setting, with the assurance of ongoing relevance. Participants professional affiliations varied from General Practitioners to sexual health workers and medical students. In early 2021, the CERSH team started to include a section in their monthly newsletter dedicated to marketing the modules. Each month a new module was highlighted and explained, and participant feedback was provided to entice enrolment. In addition to the CERSH monthly newsletter, team members marketed the modules within their sexual health networks and to numerous medical and nursing students.

After assessing the modules evaluation reports from 2021 – June 2022, over 83% of survey respondents stated that after working through the modules, they were able to entirely explain areas of sexual health care that need special consideration in a rural community. In Module 3, based on STI testing and treatment, 88% of survey respondents stated that they now have an increased knowledge of recommended treatment management plans for STIs in a rural community. The general consensus throughout the evaluation reports, was that participants most enjoyed the interactive learning videos to help assess case studies in a real-life setting.

The modules are also currently being modified for medical students to utilise in our Sexual Health Across Clinical Contexts discovery subject with the University of Melbourne. We have found this as a great way to use our resources efficiently. The current medical MD3 students complete Principles of Clinical Practice (PCP) subject including a term on Women’s health. The CERSH online modules are suggested to all the students to upskill on sexual health in areas that PCP may not cover. They are used as supplement for the subject by interested students. All the CERSH online modules have all been accredited by the RACGP and ACRRM.

Gain access to the modules here: https://medicine.unimelb.edu.au/cersh#online-learning-modules

CERSH ONLINE MODULE FEEDBACK

Check out what some of the participants of our online modules had to say about their online experience…

Sarah Lewis (Registered Nurse):
I have found the on-line modules a great recourse to consolidate my knowledge base and I frequently use the resources that were provided in the modules. I thoroughly enjoyed the case study quizzes at the end of the training. I think they were great.

Samantha Lawrenson (Clinical Nurse & Contact Tracing Officer):
I thoroughly enjoyed the Facets of Rural Sexual Health, they provided a broader knowledge of the skills required when working in a rural setting. I particularly enjoyed the modules on STI management, Pharmaceutical Access for Sexual Health Care, Service Delivery of Medical Abortion in a Rural Context and Syphilis. Though Victoria differs from Queensland on a number of topics/laws it was an excellent interactive program which has further assisted me in expanding my knowledge to improve patient care and outcomes, I appreciate how versatile the program was and encourage people to enrol! Thank you!

Haisley Formosa (PGY2 Regional Hospital-Based GP Registrar):
Thank you for allowing me access to these modules - I have found them very useful prior to community GP placement to complete. Some modules served as a refresher (luckily I was still in medical school with the CST changes), some I learnt about for the first time in detail (re options for GPs administering MToPs), and the rural focus I found useful as even in the regional area in NSW I work, appointments, cost and transport amongst certain demographics all play a huge role in accessibility.

Aimee Francis (Registered Nurse):
The best advice I could give others wishing to complete these modules is this: do it for the knowledge you will gain. It will make you stand out of the crowd by being inclusive, educated and enthusiastic. You are also very supported by the administration team and the references included in the modules.
CERSH PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DAY

In November 2021, CERSH held their first Professional Development Day over Zoom. CERSH would have traditionally held its bi-annual conference in 2021, however due to COVID-19 restrictions, an online professional development opportunity was provided instead. The day was organised to bring together professionals working in sexual and reproductive health, with the aim of increasing the knowledge, skills, and capacity of the workforce. The day featured six presentations from speakers working in sexual health with a diverse range of priority groups. Registration and attendance exceeded expectation when considering the prevalence of Zoom fatigue, with 108 people joining on the day. Of 24 evaluation survey responses, 8 people strongly believed, and 14 somewhat believed, that their knowledge regarding sexual health increased as a result of their attendance at the professional development day.

Some of the feedback received in the post-event evaluation included:

‘Thank you so much, it’s been really good and I have learnt a lot more and have a lot more ideas and holistic approach for this.’
- Module Participant

‘Well done CERSH team - such a fantastic day with so many interesting presentations.’
- Module Participant

‘The Professional Day didn’t increase my knowledge about sexual health but gee it increased my knowledge of how to offer sexual health information and services to Aboriginal people and people from CALD backgrounds!’
- Module Participant

The Centre for Excellence in Rural Sexual Health (CERSH) presents...

HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE
- a holistic inclusive approach to sexual health for young people.
- the impacts of discrimination on sexual health and tools for respectful communication & engagement with priority populations.
- engaging with refugee and migrant communities on sensitive issues – Sexual Health, BBV & STIs.

Department of Rural Health
Centre for Excellence in Rural Sexual Health

Professional Development Day / Conference

Thursday, November 11th 2021 | 9AM - 5PM

VIRTUAL

This exciting online forum is designed to showcase current evidence-based practice in relation to sexual health promotion with priority populations. It would be of interest to workers in the clinical, health promotion, education, youth and related fields and decision makers.
SEXUAL WELLNESS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SERIES

The Sexual Wellness Professional Development Series was proposed by CERSH, as a way to provide topical knowledge sessions in real time for our stakeholders, partners, and other various groups that work in the sexual health space. Expanding on from our professional development day in November 2021, the series speakers were selected based on needs and wants from our communities as well as topical issues relevant across Australia.

Three sessions were run in March, April, and May 2022, which attracted almost 200 registrants. An event highlight was hosting Jodi Rogers from Love on the Spectrum as our first speaker.

SEXUAL HEALTH NETWORK MEETINGS

In 2021 CERSH continued to prioritise connecting the sexual health workforce, holding three online meetings over October and November, that saw over 57 participants attend representing 29 organisations and 15 local government areas. The meetings promoted sexual health workers to come together to share, learn, network and facility collaborative action.

Each meeting featured several speakers, who spoke on the topics of youth engagement, youth and social media, Aboriginal youth and sexual health, consent education and overviews of additional professional development opportunities across the state. In addition to hearing from key speakers, participants were then able to network and converse during the allocated time for discussion, where informal communication was encouraged.

The online format allowed participants from across Australia to connect and not be restricted by their geographical location. The overall feedback from the meetings was positive, with most participants indicating that the topics covered were highly relevant to their work, and as a result of the meeting, their sexual health knowledge increased.
SEXUAL HEALTH VICTORIA PEER MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

In partnership with Sexual Health Victoria, CERSH led the development of a Peer Mentorship Program in the Loddon Mallee region in June 2021. The Peer Mentorship Program aimed to build the capacity of youth workers and health promotion officers to deliver sexual and reproductive health education and activities to young people. The program included online modules, one online and one face-to-face workshop, and delivery of sexual health education and activities. The program has helped strengthen the collaborative action between CERSH and Sexual Health Victoria to support the rural and regional sexual health workforce in Victoria. More sessions are scheduled to be held in the second half of 2022.

SEXUAL HEALTH COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE MEETINGS

The aim of the Communities of Practice (CoP) for CERSH, is to provide opportunities for the regional and rural workforce to create connections, share ideas, increase their knowledge, and plan collaborative action. CoPs are one strategy that we are contributing to workforce capacity building. As momentum grows in the region, the CoPs are a format for sexual wellness action planning and evaluation. Our CoP content is designed in response to informal needs assessments done in discussion with the workforce.

February 2022

Dates: 15th, 17th and 22nd

Three meetings were held in a hybrid format across Mildura, Bendigo, and Swan Hill. Presentations were given by HEY Diversity Bendigo worker Maree Dixon, RhED (Resourcing health and education in the sex industry), and La Trobe University. CERSH presented on current STI/BBV epidemiology relevant to local areas. The meetings allowed for both in-person and online attendance and included a lunch for those attending in person. There were approximately 50 attendees across all three meetings.

May 2022

Date: 17th

One online Community of Practice meeting was held in the second quarter. Presentations were given by and on the following:

- **STI/BBV Surveillance Data Presentation** – CERSH
- **SHOUT Posters** – CERSH
- **Service Update and Overview** – Hayley Davis and Kathryn Evans, Women’s Health Loddon Mallee
- **Regional Update** – Leah Wastell, Bendigo Community Health Services

Megan Smith’s presentation on cervical screening and self-collection was relevant and timely for clinicians, as guidelines on screening changed as of July 1st 2022. There were approximately 30 online attendees.

SUNRAYSIA SYPHILIS PROJECT

In early 2021, The Department of Health, Victoria funded CERSH to coordinate community engagement strategies to support the reduction of syphilis incidence in Sunraysia. The engagement strategies aimed to address the increase in syphilis in the Mildura region by promoting general awareness around syphilis and its increasing prevalence, increasing awareness of primary prevention strategies and sexual health and wellbeing and, normalising and generating positive sentiment towards getting tested for syphilis (and other STIs) by women and men.

CERSH established a network of local champions who provided guidance, advice and engagement with the local community. Through co-design a series of community-led engagement interventions were implemented with specific cohorts, in partnership with local health services, key community agencies, local schools and the local Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations. The community wide and place-based interventions raised awareness of the rise in syphilis and worked to compliment the messages of the broader Department of Health Syphilis campaign.

The CERSH campaign was targeted and only active in regional Victoria – Mildura and surrounds, acknowledging the transient nature of rural populations to neighbouring areas such as Robinvale and Shepparton.

The collaboration and support of local agencies rallying to respond to the rising concern of syphilis successfully increased conversations about syphilis in Mildura. Anecdotally, it also increased clinic visits and awareness of Syphilis by clinic patients.
MILDURA SEXUAL WELLNESS ACTION PLANNING WORKSHOP

In 2022 CERSH were excited to facilitate a process of localised planning across Loddon Mallee, commencing firstly in Mildura Rural City Council. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) was used as a tool to encourage the Sexual Wellness Planning Working Group (Mildura) to reflect on current and future conditions which may affect Mildura’s ability to achieve positive sexual health outcomes. This 3-step process assisted participants to discover our greatest strengths, potential opportunities, share their aspirations, and co-construct their most preferred future. The benefit of using an AI process is the way it uses an explorative and creative process to envisage a new future. AI assists us to remember the best parts of the past and to take those key successes forward to create a new future.

This workshop brought together stakeholders in sexual health to dream of the future of sexual health in Mildura. This workshop was the first consultation in the drafting of a Mildura Sexual Wellness Action Plan.

Attendees consisted of 15 members from the Sunraysia Community Health Services, Mallee Sexual Assault Unit and Headspace Mildura.

SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION AND HEALTH PROMOTION IN CULTURALLY & LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE (CALD) COMMUNITIES IN MILDURA

In 2022 CERSH conducted successful community consultation with community leaders in Mildura at the Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council (SMECC). Attendees had productive discussions including setting up ground rules, a quick introspection into health, discussion of some epidemiological data relating to sexual health (STI-BBV) in Mildura and activities to gauge sexual health priorities and needs of the communities. After much discussion, numerous sexual health challenges were suggested from the group and conversations on how to target these moving forward were had, along with workshop potential solutions. The rest of the session focused on health promotion amongst CALD communities in Mildura in collaboration with the local health service, Centre for Cultural Ethnicity and Health, Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council, Headspace and Spiritual Health Association.

STI TESTING VENDING MACHINES

CERSH has recently embarked on piloting two ‘full service’ STI testing vending machines that can provide access to testing for chlamydia, gonorrhoea, syphilis, and HIV all in one simple take home and post back kit. The initiative came after conversations with sexual health professionals in the UK and around Victoria and New South Wales about helping source a solution to reducing wait times, increase convenience and allow confidentiality for rural people.

During the planning phase in 2022, we met with key stakeholders and experts to discuss the practicalities of expanding the current TestMe program run by Melbourne Sexual Health Centre. Recognizing that accessing or receiving a posted chlamydia and gonorrhoea test can be a barrier for some people, it was important to discuss whether providing localised access through a self-dispensed machine would still allow for some current processes to be followed. Adding additional tests would also be a challenge that required further discussion.

Thus far we have created a user interface and created the packaged kits, adapting the TestMe kit to ensure that they would fit in the new technology. Based on funding, CERSH decided that we would initially pilot two vending machines across the Loddon Mallee and Hume regions, being placed in areas deemed acceptable through community and local professional consultation. We have met with key stakeholders to discuss how additional STI tests could be accommodated within current processes, what types of samples would be necessary and how these samples could be safely sent to a lab for processing.

While we still have a few hurdles to overcome, the physical vending machines are well into their build with a complete user interface (UI) that we designed in-house modelled on the successful UI of the original British machines that have also influenced machines in New Zealand, Japan and Tanzania. At this stage, our vending machines will be the only ones in Australia to dispense a full suite of tests and they will be the only ones in rural and regional areas to the best of our knowledge worldwide.
SEXUAL HEALTH OUT AND ABOUT (SHOUT) PROJECT
The SHOUT working party – a joint project between CERSH and the Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YacVic) - continued to provide resources for workers to promote positive sexual health messages and access to means of prevention of STIs for rural young people in 2021 and 2022.

SHOUT CONDOM VENDING MACHINES INITIATIVE
Since 2011, the SHOUT initiative has been working with local councils, across the Hume and Loddon Mallee regions, to advocate for and assist in, the installation of Condom Vending Machines in accessible locations such as public bathrooms that are open 24 hours. More than 50 Condom Vending Machines have been installed across more than ten rural Victorian LGAs, particularly targeting smaller townships where barriers to accessing condoms are likely to be more significant.

In late 2021 and early 2022, SHOUT spearheaded the replacement of Condom Vending Machines where the machines were vandalized or damaged – including Bendigo, Shepparton, Buloke and Alpine Shire council – to continue providing 24/7 access to low-cost condoms to regional Victorians.

Want to know where we have located our Condom Vending Machines? Check out this interactive map we have created [HERE](#).

SHOUT POSTER PROJECT EDUCATION SESSIONS
CERSH partnered with Sunraysia Community Health Services, Headspace Mildura, Swan Hill Rural City Council, HEY Diversity Bendigo, Thorne Harbour, WDEA Works and Access Australia Group to coordinate and facilitate the re-design of the SHOUT posters. This involved 26 young people living with a disability or LGBTQI identifying, to co-design the new posters over four group sessions based in Mildura, Swan Hill and Bendigo. Each session was also accompanied with sexual health education discussions. The participants concepts and ideas were used to create polished posters. Their feedback was sought, and 4 new SHOUT posters were finalised and put into distribution.

Topics covered in the education sessions included STI prevention, testing and treatment, healthy relationships, and consent. The LGBTQI sessions included trans health, and an opportunity to ask questions of two individuals with lived experience of gender transitioning. A pizza lunch was shared with participants at all sessions, providing an incentive for participation and opening the door to informal conversations about sexual health.

“HEY’ diversity worker about the project was that the guest speakers were fantastic and that ‘the session on lived experience from LGBTQIA+ community members was so positive and it gave the young people hope for their future’.

- Feedback from a Bendigo

SHOUT WEBSITE – TRANSITION PROJECT
In early 2022, the team also worked to transition the SHOUT website from its independent page into the CERSH website on the University of Melbourne’s website platform. This was to promote more online traffic to the website and numerous resources provided by the working party. The website is now live.

Check out the new SHOUT website here: [https://medicine.unimelb.edu.au/cersh#shout](https://medicine.unimelb.edu.au/cersh#shout)

**Pictured:** We also worked with the Shepparton City Council to run a design competition for young people in Shepparton to create the machine wraps. This was one of the final products.
STI TESTING WEEK 2021

Since 2018, CERSH has been a key partner on the Department of Health STI Testing Week campaign. In 2020, the campaign was held in November (not the usual September date due to COVID-19 Pandemic communication priorities) and CERSH was responsible for targeting young people across Victoria (aged 15-29).

Following on from a successful STI Testing Week in 2020, CERSH ran a campaign across Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat to generate traffic to a site hosted the on Better Health from October 7 to October 23. The campaign had an enormous reaction rate with over 35,000 users clicking through to the website to find out more. For the 2021 campaign, the same video graphics were used that were created in 2020, as a deliberate approach to allocate more funds towards marketing and targeting rural Victorians aged 15 to 29.

This was the first year that Snapchat was used as a platform to reach a younger demographic, and it was incredibly successful in gathering the interest of users with 70% of users who saw the campaign, swiping up to find out more.

Like previous years, the objective of the campaign was to drive as many Victorians aged 15 to 29 to the Better Health Channel website to check where they could get an STI test. Evaluations from the campaign show that expectations for the campaign were exceeded which will help consolidate funding for future campaigns.

THE BUSY YOUTH WORKERS GUIDE

In early 2022, CERSH in collaboration with Jenny Walsh and YacVic, introduced ‘The Busy Youth Workers Guide to Talking Sexual Health’ for the sexual and reproductive health workforce. The online guide includes various resources and information on sexual health and relationships for young people and allows workers to lean on this advice when informing in their professional practice.

The guide is embedded in the University of Melbourne, CERSH website platform and is an interactive, self-guided resource. It includes various types of assets ranging from PowerPoint slides to videos and podcast episodes. Topics include but are not limited to: Sensitive and Inclusive Practice, STIs and Testing, Contraception and Abortion and Pregnancy and Maternal Health.

As mentioned in the guide, the website is not a course but rather a smorgasbord of topics and information that can be chosen at the workers discretion.

CERSH will continue to work with the guides partners to update and improve the online resource over time.

VICTORIAN CLINICAL NETWORK FOR ABORTION AND CONTRACEPTION CARE (VCNACC)

In 2021, the committee for the Victorian Rural Clinical Network for Unintended Pregnancy and Abortion, officially changed the names to the Victorian Clinical Network for Abortion and Contraception Care (VCNACC), to reflect the drive of the network to attract clinicians across Victoria, to support and resource their work in abortion and contraception care.

The network meets quarterly using video-conferencing software and at sites in Bendigo and Wodonga. However, during 2021 all meetings were held virtually. The content is guided by a clinical advisory committee, and the clinical lead is Dr Paddy Moore, Head of Unit Abortion and Contraception Service, The Royal Women’s Hospital. RACGP points are allocated for each meeting attended.

Six meetings were held from the beginning of 2021 to the end of June 2022. Each of these meetings were held virtually and recorded for attendee’s future reference. The format included clinical case study discussions, guest presentations, sharing of information about the current provision of EMA in each locality, professional development opportunities, rural perspectives, and emerging issues. After the meeting has concluded, summary notes are also written and uploaded to our CERSH website. Download meeting summaries HERE.

The network is RACGP accredited.

Check out the recordings of each meeting in 2021 and up to June 2022, at the links below:

- MAR 9, 2021
- JUN 15, 2021
- AUG 24, 2021
- NOV 30, 2021
- MAR 15, 2021
- JUN 21, 2021

Advisory Committee for the Victorian Clinical Network for Abortion and Contraception Care (VCNACC)

A Clinical Advisory Committee continued to meet in 2021 – June 2022, to ensure the Victorian Clinical Network for Abortion and Contraception Care (VCNACC) is guided by rural practitioners currently providing unplanned pregnancy and abortion services. This committee, led by CERSH staff and Cath Hannon and Dr Paddy Moore from The Royal Women’s Hospital, determines the content and agendas for the VCNACC meetings. This is to ensure relevancy for rural clinicians and to respond to emerging issues and developments in clinical practice.

Health Practitioner Resource Hub for Abortion and Contraception Care

CERSH continued to utilise our online Resource Hub to support health practitioners working in the domain of unintended pregnancy and abortion. In 2021, the online Resource Hub transitioned to the new CERSH website on the University of Melbourne platform. The new website allowed for more user-friendly access and branding cohesiveness.

There are over 100 free resources, tools and materials available, including:

- Establishing medical abortion in your clinic
- Protocol and referral templates
- Information to provide to patients
- Clinical practice resources and case studies
- Policy papers and published research

Access the online Resource Hub here: https://medicine.unimelb.edu.au/cersh/learn/health-practitioner-resource-hub
THANK YOU TO THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS FOR THEIR WORK IN 2021/2022:

Dr Paddy Moore (The Royal Women’s Hospital)

Cath Hannon (The Royal Women’s Hospital)

Sourav Jain (Centre for Excellence in Rural Sexual Health)

Mary Anne McClusky (Bendigo Community Health Services)

Louise Holland (Bendigo Community Health Services)

Dr Karishma Kaur (Bendigo Community Health Services)

Dr Poornima Amaranarayana (Bendigo Community Health Services resigned during this period)

Olivia Stuart (Gateway Health)
RESEARCH

Active contribution to research projects and steering committees has ensured that CERSH represents the sexual and reproductive health needs of rural communities on large national projects, as well as contributing to building an evidence base in rural sexual and reproductive health.

CERSH staff were involved in the following research activity:

The Centre of Research Excellence in Sexual and Reproductive Health for Women: Achieving Better Outcomes through Primary Care (SPHERE) Advisory Group. Monash University, NH&MRC funded. (Professor Jane Tomnay, Associate Investigator).

Including membership on the following sub-committees:

• The Centre of Research Excellence in Sexual and Reproductive Health for Women: Achieving Better Outcomes through Primary Care (SPHERE) Abortion working group. Monash (Professor Jane Tomnay, Associate Investigator).
• The Centre of Research Excellence in Sexual and Reproductive Health for Women: Achieving Better Outcomes through Primary Care (SPHERE) contraception working group. Monash (Professor Jane Tomnay, Associate Investigator).
• The Centre of Research Excellence in Sexual and Reproductive Health for Women: Achieving Better Outcomes through Primary Care (SPHERE) pre-conception working group. Monash (Professor Jane Tomnay, Associate Investigator).

The Australian Contraception and Abortion Primary Care Practitioner Support (AusCAPPS) Network, NH&MRC funded; Monash. (Professor Jane Tomnay, Associate Investigator).

The ORIENT study: improving Rural and regional access to long acting reversible contraception and medical abortion through tasksharing and Telehealth. MRFF funded; Monash (one of the Chief Investigators, Professor Jane Tomnay).

Management of Chlamydia Cases in Australia (MoCCA project) Advisory Group. NH&MRC funded; University of Melbourne. (Professor Jane Tomnay, Associate Investigator).

CERSH staff were authors in the following publications in 2021 – June 2022:


CERSH Staff were invited speakers for the following presentations in 2021 – June 2022:

**Tomnay JE.** Working with WHO on HIV testing and contact tracing programs. *Australian and New Zealand Nurses in AIDS Care AGM.* Oct 2021.


CERSH Staff were presenters/authors in the following conference presentations in 2021 – June 2022:

**Bourke S** and **Tomnay J.** An Australian first: Sexual and Reproductive Health Care Education for Medical Students delivered over the entirety of MD at The University of Melbourne. 16th ESCRH Congress Ghent Belgium, May 2022.


Subasinghe A, Hamidi N, Buckingham P, Shankar M, Amos N, **Tomnay J,** Mazza M. Improving contraceptive health literacy and increasing knowledge, preference, and uptake, for long acting reversible contraception (LARC), among women from rural and remote areas, culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds: A protocol of the EXTEND PREFER study. SHERE AGM, virtual 2021.


Jacqueline Coombe, Jane L Goller, Helen Bittleston, Fabian Yuh Shiong Kong, Henrietta Williams, **Jane Tomnay,** Alaina Vaisey, Sue Malta, Meredith Temple-Smith, Louise Bourchier, Andrew Lau, Eric P F Chow, Jane S Hocking Impact of COVID-19 hard lockdown on sexual behaviours in Victoria, Australia: findings from a national online survey. STI/HIV World Congress July 14-17 2021, Amsterdam/Virtual.


Subasinghe AK, Amos N, Buckingham P, **Tomnay J,** Mazza D. Improving contraceptive health literacy and increasing knowledge, preference, and uptake, for long acting reversible contraception (LARC), among women from rural and remote areas, culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds: A protocol of the EXTEND PREFER study. *Australasian Academic Association for Primary Care Annual Research Conference. Virtual 12 – 13 August 2021.*


Goller J, Coombe J, Bittleston H, Bourne C, Bateson D, Vaisey A, **Tomnay J, O’Donnell H,** Garrett CC, Estcourt CS, Temple-Smith M, Hocking J. General practitioner views towards patient delivered partner therapy for chlamydia infection in Australia. Submitted to *STI&HIV World Congress, 14-17 July 2021 (was Amsterdam – now virtual)*


CERSH staff were collaborators in the following successful competitive grant applications in 2021


CERSH PARTNERS
AND COLLABORATORS

Partners 2021-2022

CERSH would like to thank all of our partners for providing ongoing support in our efforts to improving rural sexual health.
CERSH PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS

Collaborators 2021/2022

Access Australia Bendigo
Alpine Shire
Anglicare Victoria
Benalla Rural City Council
Bendigo Community Health Services
Bendigo & District Aboriginal Co-operative (BDAC)
Bendigo Health
Bendigo Pride
Bendigo Senior Secondary College
Brave Foundation
Buloke Shire Council
Burnet Institute
Castlemaine Health
Central Goldfields Shire Council
Centre for Culture, Ethnicity & Health (CEH)
CHIRP Community Health
Department of Education and Training
Department of Justice
Doctors in Secondary Schools
Echuca Regional Hospital
Gannawarra Shire Council
Gateway Health
Gippsland Women's Health
Glyde Health
Goulburn Valley Health
GOTAFE
GV Pride
City of Greater Bendigo
City of Greater Shepparton
Griggmedia
headspace Albury Wodonga
headspace Bendigo
headspace Diversity Group Bendigo
headspace Echuca
headspace Mildura
headspace Swan Hill
ILBIJERRI Theatre Company
Indigo Shire Council
La Trobe University Bendigo – Rural Health School

Loddon Shire Council
Macedon Ranges Shire Council
Mallee Children and Youth Area Partnership
Mallee District Aboriginal Services (MDAS)
Mallee Family Care
Mansfield Shire Council
Mildura Base Public Hospital
Mildura Rural City Council
Mount Alexander Shire Council
Murray City Country Coast GP Training
Murray Primary Health Network
Sea Lake Neighborhood House
North East Support & Action for Youth
NJERNDI ABORIGINAL
Northern District Community Health
Positive Women
Robinvale District Health Services
Rumbalara Co-op
Shepparton Medical Centre
Spiritual Health Association
SPHERE Monash University
Strathbogie Shire Council
Sunbury and Cobaw Community Health
Sunraysia Community Health Services
Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council
SUNI Tafe
Swan Hill District Health
Swan Hill Rural City Council
Thorne Harbour Health
Thorne Harbour Country
Women's Health Grampians
Women's Health Goulburn North East (WHGNE)
Women's Health Loddon Mallee
Women with Disabilities Victoria
YO Bendigo
Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic)
Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO)