



Centre for Excellence in Rural Sexual Health

Annual Report

2024/2025

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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 from July 2024 to June 2025.

This report is also a requirement as stipulated in the service agreement between the Victorian Department of Health and The University of Melbourne.



Department
of Health

Acknowledgement of Country

The University of Melbourne acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the unceded land on which we work, learn and live: the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Bunurong peoples (Burnley, Fishermans Bend, Parkville, Southbank and Werribee campuses), the Yorta Yorta Nation (Dookie and Shepparton campuses), and the Dja Dja Wurrung people (Creswick campus).

The University also acknowledges and is grateful to the Traditional Owners, Elders and Knowledge Holders of all Indigenous nations and clans who have been instrumental in our reconciliation journey.

We recognise the unique place held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the original owners and custodians of the lands and waterways across the Australian continent, with histories of continuous connection dating back more than 60,000 years. We also acknowledge their enduring cultural practices of caring for Country.

We pay respect to Elders past, present and future, and acknowledge the importance of Indigenous knowledge in the Academy. As a community of researchers, teachers, professional staff and students we are privileged to work and learn every day with Indigenous colleagues and partners.

In making this Acknowledgment of Country we commit to respectful and responsible conduct towards all others according to the Traditional lores of this land, particularly at times of formal ceremony.



External installation, Shepparton Art Museum, Yorta Yorta Country.

Executive Summary/ Directors Report

At the Centre for Excellence in Rural Sexual Health, we remain deeply committed to improving the sexual and reproductive health of all rural Victorians through workforce capacity building, cross-sector collaboration, and the promotion of sustainable, community-led solutions. This report provides an overview of various projects, initiatives and partnerships led and supported by CERSH from July 2024 to June 2025 across the Department of Health's designated regions of Hume and Loddon Mallee.

We take a holistic, social model of health approach to Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH), recognising that while clinical care is essential, true wellbeing will not be achieved through medical care alone, it takes the strength and involvement of whole communities. Over the last 12 months we have made a concerted effort to engage across sectors, aiming to shift community-wide attitudes, strengthen rural workforce capacity, deepen connections, and foster environments that not only equip people with the knowledge and resources to make informed decisions but also create the conditions for lasting, positive SRH outcomes.

This year we were proud to have launched our new Strategic Plan 2026–2031, which places a strong focus on shaping supportive systems that prioritise SRH, equity, and sustainability through community-led solutions. Our plan provides a clear direction for our work over the coming years, guiding our initiatives, partnerships, and advocacy.

We were proud to have continued strengthening the capacity and sustainability of SRH services across rural Victoria specifically through the Rural Services Development Project. The Working Towards Sustainability Report, launched online in February 2025, has provided practice managers with practical strategies to improve service efficiency and embed sustainable practice models. Following this, the Rural Sexual and Reproductive Health Training Guide launched in March supported workforce development by outlining accessible training and funding opportunities as well as funding pathways for rural practitioners. Another major success of this project was the SRH MBS Guide, also released in March, which reached more than 100 regional General Practitioners and Nurse Practitioners, supporting financial sustainability through optimised Medicare billing. Collectively, these initiatives have enabled us to contribute valuable knowledge and practical guidance, helping services navigate the complexities of rural SRH delivery.

Our Communities of Practice (CoPs) and Sexual Wellness Action Plans (SWAPs) continued to support communities in taking a coordinated and strategic approach to SRH. This year, we introduced a new CoP working alongside champions in the Mitchell Shire. We also conducted a formal evaluation of our first full-cycle SWAP in Mildura, which highlighted the significant impact of SWAPs, including positive cultural shifts, reduced stigma, and stronger local ownership of SRH priorities.

We were pleased to host another successful SexRurality Conference in June 2025, welcoming 130 delegates to the Department of Rural Health's Shepparton Campus. As Australia's only rural and regional sexual health conference, SexRurality continues to provide a valuable platform for professional development, knowledge sharing, and networking for SRH professionals. This year's program highlighted the unique strengths and challenges of rural and regional Victorian communities, featuring plenary sessions, panel discussions, four concurrent streams, and 40 presented abstracts covering clinical practice, education, research, and community engagement. The conference showcased innovative approaches to SRH, facilitated critical discussions on emerging issues, and fostered connections across sectors, reinforcing its role as a cornerstone event for rural and regional SRH workforce.

Remaining true to our core values, we were also proud to continue to deliver initiatives responsive to the unique needs of our communities, delivering a range of targeted education and project-based initiatives shaped by expressed priorities. We supported organisations to embed sexual health promotion through tailored, evidence-based action plans, provided educators with curriculum-aligned resources, and delivered professional development including online modules reaching more than 1100 participants. Bespoke workshops with rural workforce supporting Aboriginal youth, CALD communities, and volunteers enhanced confidence and skills to have safe, evidence-based SRH conversations. Our evaluations showed measurable improvements in knowledge, confidence, and practical capability, reinforcing the impact of our locally tailored approach.

In closing, we want to take a moment to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of our rural and regional partners and allied organisations across Victoria and Australia. Your dedication and collaboration enables us to deliver targeted, evidence-informed SRH initiatives that respond directly to community needs. As we continue this journey, we remain committed to embracing new challenges, pursuing innovative opportunities, and working collectively to foster healthier individuals, empowered communities, and a future where SRH education and care is accessible, supported, and valued by all.

Professor Jane Tomnay AM
Director
CERSH

Anne-Marie Kelly
Deputy Director
CERSH

Key Achievements



130

Delegates attended SexRurality Conference 2025 to hear 40 presentations



192

Participants across 18 Community of Practice meetings



7

Sexual health organisational opportunities checklists completed



562 registrations

Number of registrations for Sexual Wellness Professional Development Series



301 certificates

Issued for CERSH online training modules



115

STIX health tests dispensed



6

Sexual Wellness Action Plans



119 students

Studied Sexual Health Across Clinical Contexts as part of the MD Discovery electives



287

YouTube views of recorded education sessions throughout 2024/2025

CERSH Vision & Priorities

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 regions in rural Victoria. In achieving this, the Centre's priority areas are focused on:

Rural Workforce Capacity and Development

- 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.
- Support clinical workforce and interagency capacity to focus on and deliver reproductive health services and care to priority populations.
- Build knowledge dissemination strategies using information and communications technology to ensure rural workers have access to resources.

Affordable Sexual and Reproductive Health

- Continue partnership work with a range of organisations and practitioners, (both local and statewide), to improve:
 - » access to STI/BBV prevention, testing, treatment and care,
 - » 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 Sexual Health and EMA service models.
- Support the rural workforce to promote community awareness of Sexual Health services and 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.

Governance & Regions

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 Team 2024/2025

Professor Jane Tomnay AM

Director

Anne-Marie Kelly

Deputy Director

Associate Professor Siobhan Bourke

Sexual Health Physician/Senior Lecturer

Ashleigh Colquhoun

Sexual Health and Wellbeing Project Officer

Kim Cowen

STIX Project Coordinator

Karli March

Rural Services Development Coordinator

Sophie Stuart

Discovery Coordinator / CERSH Centre Coordinator

Dr Dave Evans

Senior Health Promotion Manager

Ben Corio

Sexual Health and Wellbeing Project Officer

Miika Coppard

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Wellbeing Project Coordinator

Johanna Kyriakou

CERSH Centre Coordinator



Our Work in 2024/2025

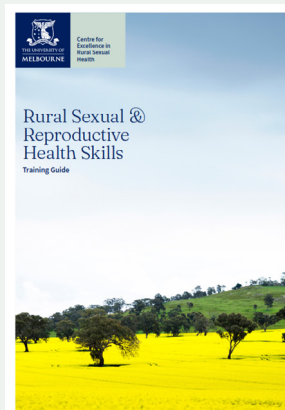
Rural Services Development Project

Commencing in 2023, the Rural Services Development Project was established to address workforce and service delivery challenges faced by the rural and regional sexual and reproductive health (SRH) sector. Over the 2024-2025 period, the project successfully developed and launched a suite of resources aimed at strengthening service delivery, enhancing workforce capacity, and supporting the long-term sustainability of rural SRH services.



***Working Towards Sustainability* report: A Practice Managers Guide**

Developed in collaboration with rural and regional SRH professionals and healthcare providers, this report highlights best practice approaches to sustainable service delivery. Specifically designed as a practical resource for practice managers, it is accompanied by a tailored Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) Guide that identifies billing opportunities to improve financial viability in rural SRH settings.



Rural SRH Training Guide

Released in March, the guide addresses key barriers to accessing training by offering a comprehensive overview of available education pathways, including information on relevant grants and scholarships. The resource has been welcomed by sector professionals, university partners, and students alike and has been actively disseminated through national and regional health networks.

These resources have been actively disseminated across Department of Health funded Women's Health Hubs and other SRH services through tailored support and presentations at sector forums.

The third and final phase of the Rural Services Development Project is currently underway, with the co-design of a clinical mentoring program being shaped by experienced SRH professionals across rural Victoria. Designed to build clinical confidence and support the translation of knowledge into everyday practice, the program will focus on strengthening service delivery and embedding sustainable models of care in rural and regional settings.

Project Highlights:

- Online launch (February 2025), of the Working Towards Sustainability Report engaged over 60 stakeholders and provides practice managers with strategies to enhance SRH service efficiency within key prototype models.
- The Rural SRH Training Guide which was released in March 2025, supports workforce development by outlining accessible training and funding opportunities for rural practitioners. The guide has been disseminated through national and regional health networks and partners.
- Released in March 2025, the SRH MBS Guide has reached over 100 regional General Practitioners and Nurse Practitioners, supporting financial sustainability through optimised Medicare billing.
- Tailored service delivery advice has been provided to regional SRH services, including Department funded Women's Health Hubs, focusing on operational efficiency and financial viability.
- Information on point-of-care ultrasound was shared with stakeholders, including MBS access, accreditation, and training relevant to early medical abortion.
- Rural providers have been supported through promotion of grants and scholarships to enhance access to SRH education and training.

Southwest Healthcare – MBS Utilisation and Service Enhancement

As an extension of the rural services development project, CERSH offer tailored support to practices looking to review and explore opportunities to enhance their service delivery model.

Following the launch of the Working Towards Sustainability report, CERSH was engaged by Southwest Healthcare, a Department of Health funded women's health hub in Warrnambool, to support revenue enhancement through MBS optimisation and to expand SRH service delivery in the region.

An initial consultation with the Practice Manager identified two key priorities:

- Expanding access to intrauterine device (IUD) insertions.
- Integrating non-directive pregnancy counselling (MBS item 4001) alongside early medical abortion services.

In response, CERSH developed a tailored recommendations report. Two surveys were administered, the first post-report and prior to implementation, and the second three months later to measure progress.

Since implementation, the clinic has upskilled two additional General Practitioners in IUD insertion and is now reviewing scheduling efficiencies to further enhance service provision. The clinic has also commenced billing MBS item 4001 and continues to explore further MBS opportunities. CERSH will continue to work with the women's health hub to optimise their SRH Medicare billables and scheduling efficiencies.

CERSH has valued the opportunity to collaborate with Southwest Healthcare, who have demonstrated strong commitment to improving service accessibility and financial sustainability in SRH service delivery across regional Victoria.

Communities of Practice and Sexual Wellness Action Plans

Since 2011, CERSH has proudly supported communities across the Loddon Mallee and Hume regions through Communities of Practice (CoP). These networks are designed to strengthen collaboration, build workforce capability, and coordinate efforts among rural and regional stakeholders with a shared commitment to improving sexual and reproductive health outcomes.

Between July 2024 and June 2025, CERSH facilitated 18 CoP meetings, engaging over 190 participants representing community health, clinical services, local government, youth services, schools and early years, school nursing, sexual assault services, and mental health services.

A wide range of initiatives were coordinated and delivered to strengthen sexual and reproductive health promotion, community engagement, and workforce capability across the regions. Key highlights included cross-cultural sexual health roadshows, Sexual Health Month activities such as trivia nights, art-based condom vending machines, and library sessions on body autonomy. Regional efforts also featured STI testing access projects (STI-X), targeted training for health professionals and volunteers, and sexual health promotion community events for sexual health month, National Condom Day and IDAHOBIT. Several of these initiatives are reported in detail in this annual report.

Another key milestone for this funded period was successfully establishing a Sexual Wellness Action Plan (SWAP) in Mitchell Shire following consultation with the local workforce. Introduced in 2022, SWAPs provide a clear strategic framework to guide collaborative action and foster purposeful engagement across communities.

Looking to the future, CERSH is excited to implement a new evidence-informed process for developing SWAPs. This approach will be underpinned by ethical data collection practices to strengthen the rigor and credibility of the evidence base, ensuring each SWAP continues to be informed by accurate and contemporary local insights.

CERSH will continue to prioritise collaborative actions, increasing the reach and impact of the CoP and associated initiatives. A strong emphasis will remain on traditional health promotion strategies, including campaigns to increase condom use and address the rising rates of STIs across rural and regional communities.

Key achievements through CoP & SWAP partnerships

- **Mitchell SWAP launch (Mitchell)** – The first Mitchell SWAP was established in 2025. With this launch, all CERSH CoPs now have an active SWAP, providing a coordinated framework to guide sexual and reproductive health initiatives.
- **Sexual wellness action plan evaluation (Mildura)** – Conducted a comprehensive assessment to measure outcomes, evaluate effectiveness, and determine the impact of the SWAP on sexual and reproductive health in Mildura.
- **Cross-cultural sexual health training (Mildura, Robinvale, Swan Hill, Goulburn Valley)** – Coordinated and delivered in partnership with schools, multicultural organisations, and health services, this series of training programs strengthened workforce capability and enhanced community engagement through culturally responsive sexual health education.
- **Community sexual health promotion (All)** – Implemented and supported a coordinated suite of sexual health promotion initiatives across all regions, including Sexual Health Month activities (condom trees, youth-designed art-wrapped condom vending machines, library story times on body autonomy, women's SRH education sessions, student expos, and trivia nights), National Condom Day campaigns, IDAHOBIT Day events, and community health service tours.
- **Targeted workforce training (All)** – Delivered additional sexual health and relationships training for volunteers and community workers in Swan Hill. Regional public health units in Bendigo, North East Victoria, and Goulburn Valley also received partner notification training and completed the 1800MyOptions training.

Agenda highlights

- **Data and surveillance updates** – Provided by Loddon Mallee, Goulburn Valley, and Ovens Murray Public Health Units, informing CoP members of regional STI and BBV trends.
- **Sector updates and partnerships** – Guest presentations and service overviews from Victorian HIV and Hepatitis Integrated Training and Learning, Sexual Health Victoria, the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, and Cancer Council Victoria.
- **Women's Health Atlas** – Demonstrated practical use of the atlas, highlighting key sexual and reproductive health data relevant to each CoP region.
- **Long Story Short recommendations** – Supported discussion on implementing recommendations from Women's Health Loddon Mallee and Goulburn North East, Long Story Short report.
- **Rainbow Community Angels training** – Presented strategies for supporting communities, including risk management, safety through radical trust, solidarity, and queer joy.
- **Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan updates** – Each LGA provided community data updates and guidance on informing the development of new MPHWP plans.



Embedding the Sexual Wellness Action Plan (SWAP) in the Mildura Communities of Practice – An impact evaluation

In early 2025, CERSH commenced an evaluation to examine the impact of embedding the SWAP within the Mildura Community of Practice (CoP). Members of the CoP were invited to participate in semi structured interviews via Zoom to share their insights on how the integration of the SWAP had influenced their work and collaboration across the region.

Findings from the evaluation highlight the significant role the CERSH led Mildura CoP and the embedded SWAP have played in strengthening collaboration, coordination, and awareness of SRH services and activities in the region.

CoP members reported the SWAP provided a clear and achievable strategic direction that helped drive regional engagement and activity. The framework also offered services a practical tool to advocate for SRH internally, resulting in better use of time and resources and reducing duplication of effort.

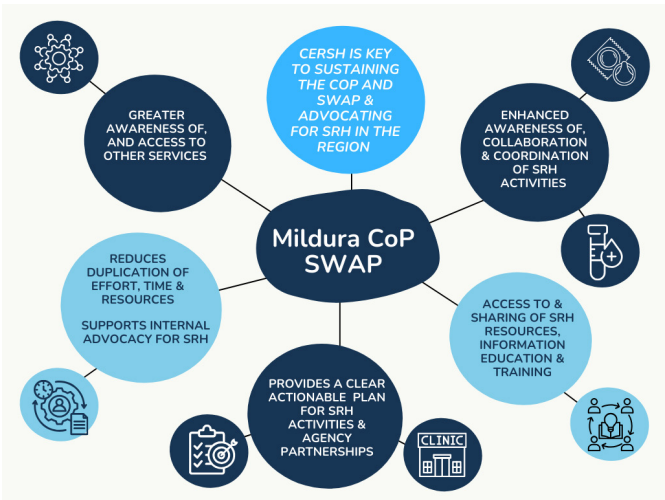
Despite well recognised regional challenges including limited resources, workforce shortages, and persistent stigma around SRH, participants expressed strong support for the ongoing facilitation of the CoP and SWAP. They emphasised that CERSH is best placed to continue leading this work, citing the organisation’s trusted relationships, specialist expertise, and demonstrated impact in the region.

This evaluation affirms the value of place based, collaborative approaches in SRH promotion and supports the continued investment in CERSH facilitated CoPs as an effective model for regional capacity building.

I think [the SWAP] has provided an action plan to guide those activities and collaboration, it's done it really, really well. It made a really inclusive plan of all of the services that were involved in some form of sexual health or sexual wellness or services for our area...we know who is who, so we can stick to what we're doing, we can call on these people if we need to, we know where we're all headed. I feel like the SWAP has definitely done that... (Participant 1)

...having a spreadsheet that shows all of the individuals that are part of the CoPs and putting together the SWAP is a very clear map and plan for me to be able to go, look, at all of the people I can call and collaborate with that Ashleigh has done all the work for me, and post out all my resources, and job's done. I would say, tenfold, certainly, the evidence that they exist - the evidence that the activity exists, that it's recorded, that it's grown looking at one SWAP plan to the next SWAP... (Participant 10)

I remember reviewing it, because that's when I read it and thought, yeah, this is great. It's an easy read and it's actionable. I think that's a huge benefit in terms of any of the activities. I think the SWAP gives the COP direction. (Participant 13)



SexRurality Conference 2025 - Reimagining Sexual Health in Rural Victoria

The Centre for Excellence in Rural Sexual Health welcomed 130 delegates to the Department of Rural Health's Shepparton Campus in June 2025 for the biannual SexRurality Conference.

The SexRurality Conference is Australia's only rural and regional sexual health conference, providing a platform for knowledge sharing on a range of sexual and reproductive health topics. This year's conference focussed on the unique strengths and challenges of rural and regional Victorian communities.

The conference plenary speakers explored topics including abortion advocacy and access, preventing violence against transgender women, sexually transmissible infections epidemiology, masculinity and respect, and cultural knowledge sharing across Indigenous communities. A panel discussion featuring medical students of the Sexual Health Across Clinical Contexts Discovery subject concluded the second day of plenary sessions.



Four concurrent streams were facilitated during the conference, with 40 abstracts presented. The stream themes included:

Creating solutions within systems and clinical contexts

The *Creating Solutions* stream highlighted solutions to challenges within systems, clinical contexts, training pathways and models of care. Presentations in this stream included:

- Sexual health clinical mentorship models
- Older Australians' sexual healthcare
- Cervical screening initiatives
- Qualitative evidence of rural women's experiences of care
- Screening tool for reproductive coercion
- Integrating sexual health promotion into Aboriginal organisations
- Abortion deserts

Building Resilience

The *Building Resilience* stream focused on planning for and responding to new and mounting challenges. Presentations in this stream included:

- Enablers and barriers to abortion care from clinical and social perspectives, including qualitative data on women's experiences accessing abortion
- Prevention of child sexual abuse
- Innovative education initiatives
- Strategies to support LGBTQIA+ communities in the face of anti-LGBTQIA+ activism



SexRurality Conference 2025 Coordinators and CERSH team members Ashleigh Colquhoun (L) and Sophie Stuart (R).



Plenary Speaker Lauren French (L) with CERSH Deputy Director, Anne-Marie Kelly (R).



Empowering Through Education

The *Empowering Through Education* stream showcased innovative, inclusive approaches to sexual health education tailored to rural communities. Presentations in this stream included:

- Educating young people from alternative education and non-English speaking settings
- Using a whole of school approach to Relationships and Sexuality Education
- Values based messaging in Sexual and Reproductive Health
- Cervical screening and self-collection
- Pop-up STI testing initiatives
- Menopause

The Education stream also included two workshops, understanding and teaching affirmative consent, and using the Cliterate model in practice.

Sexual and Reproductive health research involving rural communities

This stream focused on sexual and reproductive health research in a rural Australian context. Presentations in this stream included:

- Methoxyflurane effectiveness and tolerability for outpatient IUD insertion
- Abortion care
- Online STI testing models
- Partner delivered bacterial vaginosis treatment
- Supporting LGBTQIA+ Australians who have experience miscarriage
- Comparison of sexual activity and contraception choices of young people in metro and rural setting

The conference provided networking opportunities, a variety of informative and educational presentations and service engagement.

Sexual Health Across Clinical Contexts – future workforce training and strengthening inter-professional partnerships

Melbourne Medical School: Doctor of Medicine (MD) Discovery Elective Subject

The Sexual Health Across Clinical Contexts (SHACC) Discovery elective subject, developed by CERSH as part of the MD course at University of Melbourne, aims to address gaps in general sexual and reproductive health education experienced by many current and future medical practitioners.

Positioning sexual and reproductive health and effective history taking as fundamental building blocks to supporting overall medical care remain principal objectives of the subject. This emphasis on communication skills underpins the role many rural practitioners are expected to fulfill as generalists. Priority is given to provision of face-to-face classes on both metropolitan and rural campuses, to align with CERSH's strategic focus of upskilling the future rural medical workforce.

The third-year topic in this subject was launched in late 2024, with a focus on more complex aspects of sexual and reproductive health care. This included practical training in contraception and abortion care, exploring the impact of disability or aging on sexual health, and examining relationships & sexuality education for young people in the Australian context. Students are also taught ways of supporting patients who have experienced non-consensual sex or coercion and patients involved in sex work.

Again, focus is on clear communication and in-person classes to provide practical training for students who will be doctors at the end of the following year. A week of clinical placement forms a significant portion of this third-year topic.

Leveraging the professional partnerships initiated in earlier course levels, students are afforded clinical opportunities in a variety of settings, from sexual-health specific services to others focussing on infectious diseases, abortion and contraceptive care, community health centres and gender-affirming care. CERSH is grateful for the investment of time and expertise provided by these partnerships to enable these varied and comprehensive experiences for each student.

Students reaped the benefit of the issues covered at this year level the full cohort (100%) acknowledging they were confident advising a patient on contraception (up from 66% when surveyed prior to the topic) and 93% confident that they could advise a patient on pregnancy termination. Confidence also rose in supporting the health care of aging and disabled patients (an increase of 54% from when the cohort was surveyed before the topic began) and supporting patients engaging in sex work- with 93% of students confident of their approach after completion, up from 33% when surveyed prior to undertaking the topic.

Throughout 2025 and 2026, Associate Professor Siobhan Bourke, Professor Jane Tomnay and Anne-Marie Kelly from CERSH, in partnership with Dr Shelly Makleff from the Melbourne School of Population and Global Health are undertaking a formal evaluation of the SHACC elective subject. This evaluation uses both qualitative and quantitative research methods to explore how SHACC influences student's confidence and competence in providing sexual and reproductive healthcare to future patients. Concurrently, we are exploring how the content delivered throughout the topic reduces stigma by focusing on patient centred care and highlighting the external social, cultural, political and environmental factors that influence the experience of stigma by patients. The evaluation will explore how providing in-depth teaching and education shifts student's attitudes and perceptions over time. The results of the evaluation will be disseminated through peer reviewed publications and conference presentations.



2024 third-year SHACC students Brooke Cairns (left) and Coco Moysey (centre) with Associate Professor Siobhan Bourke (SHACC Topic Lead)

Student Feedback

Loved the F2F tutorials - definitely the highlight of the course. Learnt so much about communication in sexual health and beyond as well as about my own biases and assumptions. Really appreciated the session with simulated patients as well their great expertise and informed feedback.

D1 2025 Student

I cannot tell you how much I appreciated the focus on small group learning and in-person lectures – it is such a positive and engaging educational environment. Having the exams and OSCEs as part of the assessment was fantastic – it's always a bit daunting, but doing the exams so regularly really helped me feel more confident and comfortable. By the OSCE's I felt like I could relax and actually focus on ascertaining the clinical history/exam, rather than worrying about forgetting to relay a piece of info. ... This was a fantastic, well-organised, interesting and useful subject. I'm really glad to have been able to experience it, thank you.

D2 2024 Student

The in person classes were great, also loved the practical sessions learning to do implanon's [sic] and IUDs. This broke up the information sessions well. Placement was also an amazing experience. Probably one of my favourite placements I have done so far.

D3 2024 Student

Like that it's very practical and very engaging. The lectures don't seem dry at all and the themes and skills translate well into our placements.

D3 2024 Student



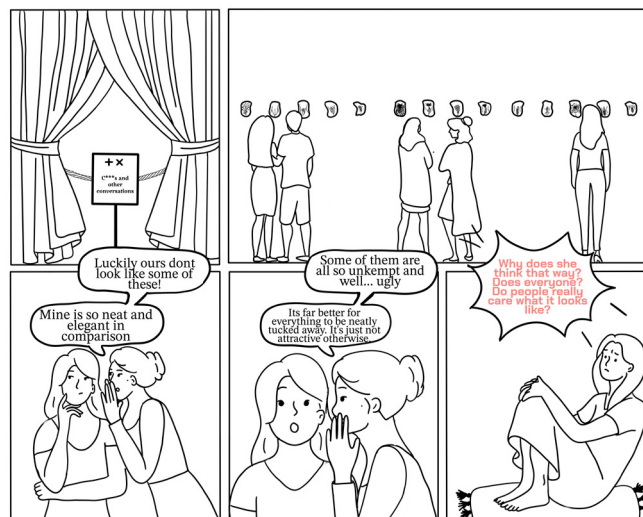
Third-year students are tested and subsequently certified (upon graduation) to conduct Implanon insertions (above) and removals (below).



Student Assignment Examples



Credit: Reflective Assignment, Sexual Health Across Clinical Contexts D1 2025 Student.



Credit: Reflective Assignment, Sexual Health Across Clinical Contexts D2 2024 Student.

*I came to appreciate the critical role we play in not only treating but also advocating for patients with sexual health concerns. This involves challenging stigma, promoting open discussions, and ensuring that all patients have access to the care and resources they need, regardless of their background or circumstances. **Reflective Assignment, Sexual Health Across Clinical Contexts D3 2024 Student***

*I am incredibly glad I chose to do sexual health as my discovery in MD3. Many of the things I learnt from this rotation I will take with me into my future practice such as procedural skills and taking a confident sexual history. From a public health perspective, observing different varieties of patients with diverse presentations reinforced the importance of advocating for marginalised groups and upholding patient autonomy and dignity. **Reflective Assignment, Sexual Health Across Clinical Contexts D3 2024 Student***

*When practising with a simulated patient, things felt more real, and I had to snap into it to take their history. I noticed something important, when I showed discomfort, they mirrored it back. My emotions set the tone for the entire interaction. Through practice and feedback, I learned to manage my reactions. **Reflective Assignment, Sexual Health Across Clinical Contexts D1 2025 Student***

Integrating the Sexual Health Promotion Checklist

CERSH was proud to introduce and trial the Promoting sexual health organisational opportunities checklist over the 2024–2025 period. The checklist provided a practical assessment tool to identify priorities and opportunities for embedding sexual health promotion in community services organisations. It supported improvements across policies, procedures, and day-to-day practices. Based on the Play Safe Organisational Checklist and VicHealth’s Integrated Health Promotion Kit, CERSH partnered with seven organisations to complete checklists and develop action plans, assessing readiness, clarifying resourcing needs, and pinpointing areas where targeted support could have the greatest impact. This hand-in-hand approach helped translate identified opportunities into practical improvements.

Key achievements included the adoption of sexual health promotion policies, enhancing staff capacity through professional learning workshops, increasing the visibility of sexual health resources, and strengthening partnerships with local sexual and reproductive health services to support referral pathways and collaborative practice.

Due to the uptake and success of the pilot, CERSH is excited to continue offering this initiative, supporting rural and regional organisations to embed sexual health promotion in sustainable and meaningful ways.

Relationships and Sexuality Teaching Material Cheat Sheet

To support rural and regional Victorian teachers in delivering comprehensive relationships and sexuality education (RSE), CERSH developed the RSE teaching material cheat sheet. Drawing on feedback from educators, the aim of the resource was to provide teachers with streamlined access to high-quality, curriculum-aligned materials, enabling them to confidently and efficiently integrate RSE into their teaching programs.

Launched in late 2024, the cheat sheet was widely accessed via the CERSH website. Informal feedback from teachers and Department of Education staff was overwhelmingly positive, highlighting its practical utility and ease of use. As the Australian Curriculum has undergone revision, this resource will be updated over the next 12 months to ensure ongoing alignment and continued relevance.



Promoting Sexual Health – Organisational Opportunities Check List

This checklist is for all community services. It will help you integrate sexual health promotion into your work and plan sexual health activities. It is based on the Play Safe Organisational Check List and the five areas of action for health promotion in the Vic Health Integrated health promotion kit.

The checklist can be completed by an individual on behalf of a service or collaboratively by teams. Work through each category, answering questions by selecting 'yes', 'no', or 'partly', 'no and 'partly' answers highlight opportunities to integrate sexual health promotion to your work.

Once you have completed the checklist CERSH can create a short action plan, highlighting priorities and assisting with resources and networking where required.

Promoting Sexual Health – Organisational Opportunities Check List



1. SETTINGS AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

	Yes	No	Partially
Does your organisation have policies in place that support sexual health promotion?			
Does your organisation integrate sexual health content into its programs?			
Are condoms freely and readily available to clients using your service?			
Does your organisation have spaces available to talk privately about sexual health?			
Are staff confident in understanding and interpreting child protection policies and workers' rights and responsibilities			
Do you have strategies for engaging and promoting sexual health work to parents and communities?			

Comments

Sexual Wellness Professional Development Series

The Sexual Wellness Professional Development Series (SWPDS) had another successful year, attracting over 562 registrations across seven webinars during the 2024–25 reporting period. The series aims to provide opportunities for capacity building for the rural and regional sexual and reproductive health workforce, tailoring content to their unique needs and connecting them with experts in the field.

Webinar topics reflected the breadth and diversity of sexual and reproductive health and wellbeing issues and needs in rural and regional communities, including innovative approaches to STI testing, inclusive care for people with disability, peer education programs for young women from migrant and refugee backgrounds, LGBTQI health, sexual revictimisation, and contemporary approaches to relationships and sexuality education.

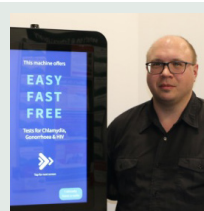
Following each webinar, attendees were invited to provide feedback, which was consistently positive. Participants commended the presenters and reported plans to implement new strategies or practices from the sessions.

All sessions were recorded and made available via the CERSH YouTube channel, enabling flexible post-event access. The webinar on STI-X, Australia's first multi-STI test vending machine, attracted the highest number of registrations, while LGBTQ Sextech: Cultures and Practices was the most viewed online content, demonstrating strong interest in innovative sexual health solutions.

The series continues to gain momentum, supporting CERSH's strategic objective of strengthening rural and regional workforce capacity. We are proud to provide evidence-informed, accessible training that strengthens the capacity of rural sexual and reproductive health professionals to serve their communities effectively.

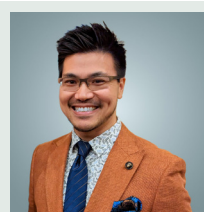
'Working in this space in a rural setting and having conversations about sex and sexuality with clients who have never had any honest conversations about sexual issues can be a lonely experience. It's great to see conversations about sex in a factual and up to date way.'

"This was a fantastic session. Any info around available professional education and practical tools is always appreciated."



Dr Dave Evans

STI-X – Australia's first multi-STI test vending machine: One year on
July 2024



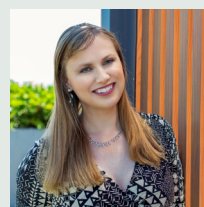
Dr Haris Noor

How to provide quality primary health care to LGBTQI patients
August 2024



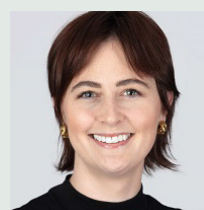
Zahra Stardust & Kath Albury

LGBTQ Sextech: Cultures and Practices
September 2024



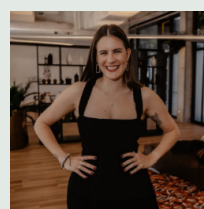
Rachel Wotton

The dignity of touch, the different roles of sex workers and the variety of reasons people with disability may access sex worker services
October 2024



Dr Emily Corbett

Exploring conditions of sexual revictimisation in regional and rural communities
February 2025



Jordina Quain

Sexuality & Relationships Education- what is it and why do we need it now more than ever
April 2025



Karen Molhuysen & Bronwyn Jones

The HERS Project: sexual & reproductive health peer education program for young women from migrant and refugee backgrounds
May 2025

Facets of Rural Sexual Health – Online Education Modules

CERSH online modules continued to be offered throughout 2024/2025, providing participants the opportunity to develop their knowledge and skill base regarding sexual and reproductive health in a rural setting. Over 220 participants enrolled throughout the year, with over 300 completion certificates issued for the individual modules throughout the year. Participant professional affiliations varied from General Practitioners (GPs) to sexual and reproductive health workers and medical students, with a high proportion from regional or rural-based services.

Module content has been adapted for use as part of our **Sexual Health Across Clinical Contexts** Discovery subject with the University of Melbourne. Students undertake revised versions of modules as asynchronous learning activities, or as pre-requisite study if accessing the second-year or third-year topics without having undertaken it in a previous year. In addition, focus is placed on a module in each edition of the bimonthly CERSH newsletter. Team members market the modules within their sexual health networks and to numerous medical and nursing students as part of health promotion activities.

Evaluation reports from the modules from July 2024 – June 2025, show that:

- The most popular module overall was Introduction to Rural Sexual Health Care comprising 24% of the modules completed and 99% of respondents felt the module was relevant to their clinical practice
- 98% of survey respondents stated after working through the modules, they were able to explain areas of sexual health care that need special consideration in a rural community.
- 86% of survey respondents stated that they now have an increased knowledge of recommended treatment management plans for STIs in a rural community completing the module on STIs.
- In the Partner Notification module, 72% of participants indicated that they could now explain the concept of partner notification and its role in the control of Sexually Transmissible Infections (STIs).
- 84% were confident they could implement strategies to increase safety of patients regardless of sexual identity or practices.
- The Privacy and Confidentiality module proved popular this year, with 73 registrants completing the module and 95% feeling entirely confident to explain to patients their right to confidentiality.

All the CERSH online modules have been accredited by the RACGP. Prospective registrants can contact CERSH to be registered, and can complete the modules in any order, in their own time.

The discussion surrounding healthcare delivery in rural vs urban settings was very helpful and provided a dynamic discourse supported by real life experience that I particularly enjoyed.

“The module successfully met learning objectives and discussed topical issues for patients in a rural context including cost, transport, accessibility and inclusivity of GP’s for LGBTQI+ as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients and CALD communities.”

“It really opened up my eyes and also reinforced how living rural can be quite a barrier of the health of some people.”




**Free & Accredited
Online Learning
Modules for Rural
Health Professionals**

Rural Sexual Health Care

Sexual Health Education on Yorta Yorta Country

Partnerships and collaboration are central to CERSH's approach. In 2024, CERSH partnered with the Academy of Sport Health and Education (ASHE) on Yorta Yorta Country in Shepparton, to support the delivery of culturally safe sexual health education.

As part of this partnership, CERSH coordinated a consent and condom use workshop in October 2024, in collaboration with a local sexual health nurse.

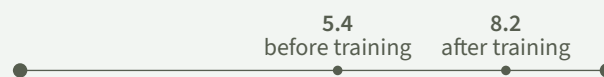
Engagement with the local sexual health service providers was crucial to building relationships and fostering future referral pathways. The workshop was co-designed with input from ASHE staff, the University of Melbourne Department of Rural Health Aboriginal Health Team, local sexual health nurses, and the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (ACCHO), Rumbalara. CERSH provided sexual health expertise, learning materials, and engagement resources, including a condom card game, condom demonstrators, condoms, printed resources, and facilitation support during the session.

Building on the success of this session, CERSH was invited back in December 2024 to deliver training on 'Talking to Young People About Sexual Health' to staff from ASHE, Rumbalara, and the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO). The training aimed to strengthen staff capacity to hold safe, evidence-based, and non-judgmental conversations about sexual health, supporting aboriginal young people to make informed decisions and promoting positive health outcomes.

Evaluation via a Qualtrics survey highlighted an increase in participants' self-reported knowledge, skills, and confidence. Participants reported being "more aware of how to start the conversation," planning to "utilise the key messages and games/activities," and described the workshop as "really enjoyable."

By fostering trust and collaboration, these initiatives laid the groundwork for long-term partnerships that empower local organisations to better support Aboriginal young people on Yorta Yorta Country.

ASHE staff self-reported confidence in addressing sexual health issues (scale of 1-10):



Cross-Cultural Sexual Health Northwest Road Show

Empowering CALD communities and rural health workers through culturally safe sexual health education across Swan Hill, Robinvale and Mildura.

In response to identified community and workforce development needs, CERSH and its partners co-designed and delivered the Cross-Cultural Sexual Health Promotion Roadshow. This project focused on three key objectives: engaging CALD communities to identify SRH needs; delivering tailored, community-based education sessions; and providing workforce training to support culturally appropriate SRH conversations. The initiative aimed to strengthen the SRH capacity of both health professionals and CALD community members in Swan Hill, Robinvale, and Mildura, by offering culturally safe and responsive sexual health education.

The planning process was highly collaborative and grounded in local knowledge, with strong engagement from CALD community leaders, health services, and established networks such as CERSH's Communities of Practice. Local epidemiological data provided by the LMPHU further informed the project's direction and priorities. MHSS played a vital role in shaping culturally appropriate messaging, co-developing resources, and ensuring that the voices of CALD communities remained central throughout the initiative.

Delivered over five days in May 2025, the Roadshow included a total of nine sessions: four workforce training workshops and five community education workshops, engaging 103 participants.

Evaluation findings indicated a significant improvement in participants' confidence and capability to discuss sexual health topics. Self-reported knowledge and skill scores increased from an average of 6.96 to 8.50 on a 10-point scale. Participants also strongly agreed the sessions increased their understanding of SRH issues faced by CALD communities and improved their ability to respond sensitively and effectively in professional or personal contexts.

This initiative demonstrates the value of sustained, local partnerships and culturally responsive program design. By centering lived experience and community engagement, the Cross-Cultural Sexual Health Promotion Roadshow has contributed to building a stronger, more inclusive rural SRH workforce and empowered community members to make informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health. The outcomes of this project reinforce the importance of investing in community-led, place-based approaches to improve SRH equity across rural Victoria.

Building on this momentum, future efforts will focus on embedding culturally responsive SRH education into ongoing local service delivery and expanding workforce training across additional rural communities.



Tapuwa Bofu (L) and Yuqian He (R) from CEH at the NorthWest Roadshow.



Girls Group participants.



Cross-Cultural Sexual and Reproductive Health Promotion - Primary Care Connect Training

For refugees, the asylum-seeking journey, the challenges associated with resettlement, plus experiences of conflict, persecution, violence or natural disasters and under-resourced health systems in their country-of-origin contribute to poorer sexual and reproductive health (SRH) outcomes. These health disparities can adversely affect individual well-being and have broader health, social, and economic consequences for communities. Healthcare workers can play a crucial role in promoting SRH, particularly for refugee populations, by providing culturally sensitive education, accessible services, and support that addresses unique needs and barriers. Training for healthcare workers in rural areas is essential to help them understand sociocultural barriers to SRH and provide safe, culturally appropriate care for refugees, ultimately improving broader health and social outcomes.

In September 2024, CERSH partnered with cohealth, Primary Care Connect (PCC) and the Centre for Culture, Ethnicity and Health (CEH) to deliver training on cross-cultural sexual health promotion for refugee, bi-cultural and healthcare workers. A Qualtrics based evaluation survey was used to assess the effectiveness of the training in achieving the project's objectives. Participants reported an increase in knowledge, skills and confidence in engaging clients from CALD backgrounds in conversations about SRH.

Participants reflected that "the training was well received and presented", "the topics were interesting and I learnt a lot", "more training like this for health professionals and community leaders would be more useful".



Public Health Unit Training

Workshop one: Let's Talk About Sex: Sexual History Taking 101 for Local Public Health Units

CERSH presented an online workshop aiming to build confidence of PHU staff to talk about sex and sexual health. This training was requested by the Loddon Mallee PHU and extended to include Ovens Murray and Goulburn Valley PHU.

55% of attendees strongly agreed and 45% somewhat agreed that the training increased their confidence talking about sexual health.

'Great to have this session with the people with the expertise!'

'Fantastic session'

'Super useful'

Workshop two: Partner notification

Following this workshop, the Loddon Mallee PHU and Ovens Murray PHU were given the opportunity to do a more in-depth professional development on partner notification and contact tracing. This follow-up training was delivered by the Director of CERSH in two workshops.

Partner notification key learnings (as reported by participants)

- Value of showing vulnerability that lead to trust
- HIV context and similarities with Mpox
- Different types of case management

Sexual Health & Relationships Training with Swan Hill volunteers and community workers

In northwest Victoria, organisations such as Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council (SMECC) and Intereach provide community support to refugees and migrants who face additional barriers to accessing sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services. Providing volunteers and community support workers in organisations like this with training on Sexual Health and Relationships is essential to empower them with the knowledge and skills they need to provide accurate information, foster open discussions, and support people in their community to make informed, healthy choices. Interactive, face-to-face training creates a valuable opportunity to learn, openly discuss sensitive topics, and practice essential communication skills in a supportive environment.

To address this need, a CERSH health promotion project coordinator delivered training on sexual health and relationships in December 2024 to nine volunteers and workers supporting refugees and migrants in the region. The workshop included topics such as Sexual Health 101, STIs and BBVs, Condoms, Contraception and Sex and the Law. A paper-based evaluation survey was used to assess the effectiveness of the training. Participants reported an increase in knowledge, skills and confidence in talking about sexual health topics from an average self-report score of 7.16/10 to 8.67/10.

Participants enjoyed the interactive training, and the opportunity to have open conversations about sexual health. Comments from participants included: *"I feel that I am better equipped to refer clients to services and answer any questions"* and *"Fantastic trainer. Delivered quality knowledge in a fun, easy manner."*



Swan Hill Volunteers Workshop attendees playing the Condom Card Game.

Sexual Health Promotion 101: building capacity through *Going Rural Health* partnership

In partnership with Going Rural Health (Department of Rural Health), CERSH delivered two Sexual Health Promotion 101 sessions over the 2024-2025 period, one at North East Health, Wangaratta and another at Goulburn Valley Health in Shepparton.

These interactive 90 minute to two-hour sessions were co-facilitated alongside local sexual health services, Clinic 35 (Gateway Health) and Meryula Clinic (Goulburn Valley Health), providing a valuable opportunity to engage students on placement with Going Rural Health, while strengthening relationships with regional health services.

The training aimed to normalise conversations around SRH, build confidence in addressing SRH within varied clinical contexts, and deepen understanding of gender, sexuality, and inclusive practice.

Course Overview:

Context of SRH prevention in Australia: An overview of national strategies, data trends, and the critical role of the healthcare workforce in promoting SRH equity.

Applying the ABCDEs framework: Practical guidance on integrating inclusive and culturally safe approaches into everyday healthcare delivery.

LGBTIQA+ inclusive practice: Exploration of respectful language, the importance of avoiding assumptions, understanding the Gender Unicorn model, and fostering welcoming environments.

Case studies and practical application: Real-world clinical scenarios demonstrating how SRH conversations and care can be embedded into routine consultations.

A key focus of the sessions was raising awareness that SRH should be a part of any healthcare appointment and not siloed or overlooked. Presentations from local services further supported student learning, highlighting referral pathways and service availability in the region. This collaboration represents an effective model for embedding SRH education within rural clinical placements and contributes to building a more confident, informed, and inclusive future health workforce.

"The session was really helpful and informative"

"I loved how engaging the presenters were.. How no topic was off limits.. Enough of a teaser to warrant further PD"

"Presenters made it feel very comfortable to speak openly about bias, opinions and made space for questions which was really important.. very informative, evidence/research based"



Shepparton

Thursday 22 May
2:30pm - 4:30pm

Presenter: Anne-Marie Kelly and Ashleigh Colquhoun,
Centre for Excellence in Rural Sexual Health (CERSH)

This workshop is designed to equip healthcare professionals with an understanding of sexual health promotion in healthcare and explore the application of sexual and reproductive health across disciplines through practical case studies.

- **Context of SRH Prevention in Australia:** Covering national policies, statistics, and the role of healthcare professionals in promoting SRH equity.
- **Applying the ABCDEs Framework:** Integrating inclusive and culturally sensitive practices into patient care.
- **LGBTIQA+ Inclusive Practice:** Focusing on respectful language, avoiding gendered assumptions (understanding the gender unicorn), and creating safe healthcare spaces.
- **Case Studies and Practical Applications:** Real-world scenarios to demonstrate the framework's applicability across various healthcare settings.

Venue
Elsie Jones Education Centre
(EJEC) Room 2, 2/2-48 Graham
Street Shepparton

Register
To register, scan
the QR code and
follow the
prompts or visit

www.learn.gvhealth.org.au



Department of Rural Health and Going Rural Health are funded under the
Australian Government's Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training Program.

Department of Rural Health
Centre for Excellence in Rural Sexual Health

going
rural
health

STI-X: Expanding Access to STI Testing in Regional Victoria

The STI-X project launched in 2023 using self-collection STI test vending machines to improve access to testing in regional and rural communities. These vending machines help overcome common barriers to STI testing in rural and regional areas, including concerns about privacy, stigma, cost, limited clinical services and long travel distances. The machines provide discreet access to self-collection kits for chlamydia and gonorrhoea and a screener for HIV (Atomo Rapid).

The initial pilot phase concluded in July 2024. Since then, STI-X has entered a second phase focused on improving return rates through longer-term placements and stronger community engagement. The two STI-X machines have been placed at Rumbalara Aboriginal Medical Clinic, Mooroopna (July 2024- Feb 2025) and Ballarat library (October 2024-current) and most recently at Cobram Library (June 2025). One was also showcased at the CERSH SexRurality Conference in June, attracting strong interest from professionals working in regional sexual health.



In response to feedback and findings from the pilot phase, several key changes have been implemented to strengthen the impact of the STI-X project.

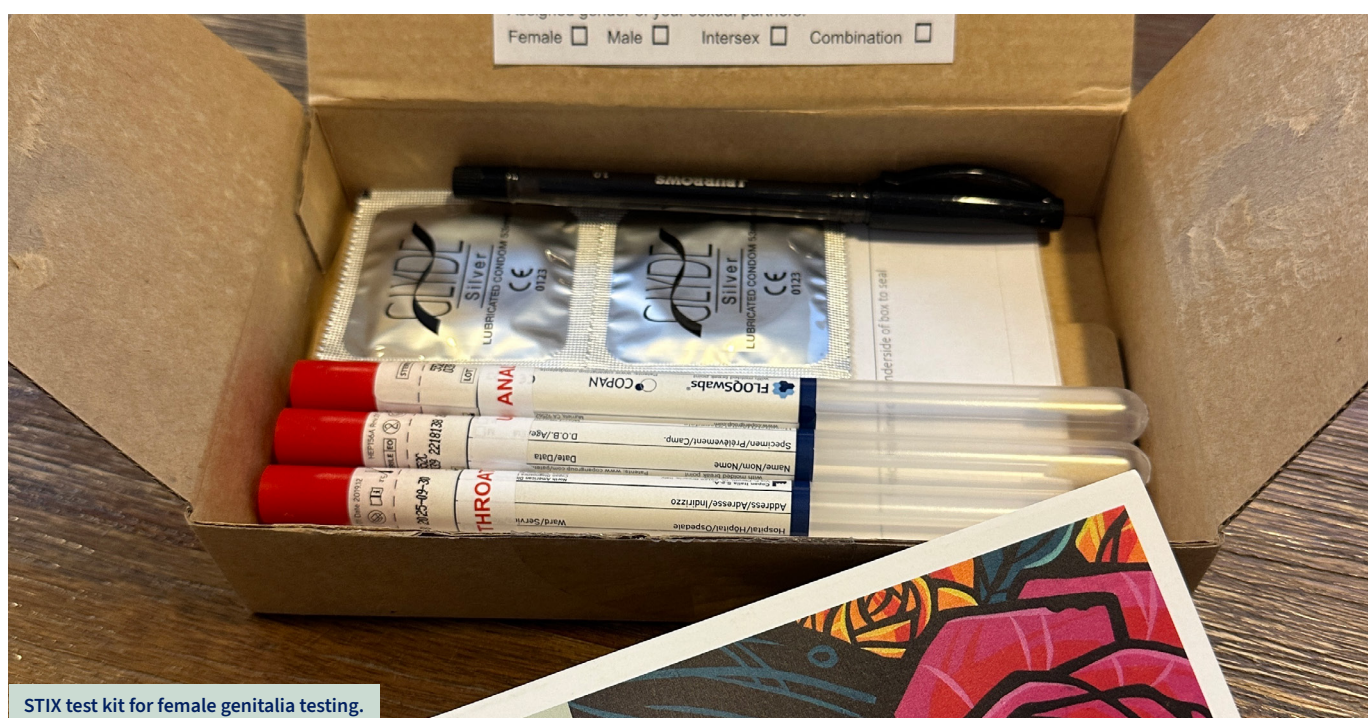
- **Extending the time each machine remains in a community.** In the pilot phase this was three to four months. Moving forward, each site will host for six-12 months. This change reflects the importance of word-of-mouth in regional areas and the time required for service acceptance. Early results from Ballarat, where STI-X has been in place for eight months, show a steady increase in kit uptake and returns, likely due to the extended placement and strong promotion by the Community Reference Group (CRG).
- **Enhanced marketing and communication.** A concerted effort has been invested into our marketing and promotions of the STI-X in an attempt to ensure communities are saturated to increase uptake. We have developed a comprehensive marketing strategy that includes social media campaigns, printed materials, and partnerships with local community networks. We have begun expanding STI-X's digital presence through updates to the CERSH website, with dedicated STI-X pages now established. These pages will continue to evolve to include additional resources, FAQs, and information for both users and communities interested in hosting machines.
- **Revised and updated the instructional materials.** Instruction sheets inside each kit have been completely redesigned to be more visual, step-by-step, and literacy-friendly, addressing diverse literacy levels in rural communities. The design includes clear icons, minimal jargon, and plain language to improve user confidence and reduce errors in self-collection. These changes aim to make the process as accessible and user-friendly as possible, which we expect will further increase kit completion and return rates.

In early 2025, we addressed safety concerns related to the machines' heavy bases (~150kg each), which posed a manual handling risk. Working with a regional fabricator, we redesigned one machine's base to improve safety, manoeuvrability, and compliance, including an AU-compliant plug and electrical tagging.

From a sustainability perspective, these changes will make machines easier to relocate to new sites and cheaper to transport, supporting the long-term scalability of the STI-X program. The second machine will be updated as logistics allow.

There is strong and growing interest from communities within and beyond the Hume and Loddon Mallee regions to co-invest in hosting STI-X machines long-term, demonstrating clear demand for this type of testing. CERSH is actively developing co-contribution partnership models to ensure sustainability.

Evaluation and data analysis are ongoing. While early indicators suggest the project is successfully reaching rural and regional populations who face barriers to traditional testing, detailed data cannot be disclosed at this stage as results are under review for journal publication. Findings will inform further refinement of the STI-X model and guide expansion into new communities.



Victorian Clinical Network for Abortion and Contraceptive Care

The Victorian Clinical Network for Abortion and Contraception Care (VCNACC) continued to meet quarterly throughout 2024/2025, maintaining the drive to support and resource clinicians across regional Victoria in their work in abortion and contraception care.

Meeting agendas are set by the Clinical Champions Project with clinical lead, Dr Paddy Moore, Head of Unit, The Abortion and Contraception Service, The Royal Women's Hospital guiding the content of these meetings in consultation with other key stakeholders. CERSH play an important role to administer the network. RACGP continuing professional development points are allocated for GPs for each meeting attended.

Four online meetings were held from July 2024 through June 2025, with attendance numbers increasing as the year progressed. Agenda items ranged from clinical case study discussions, guest presentations and sharing of information about the current provision of medical abortion in public hospitals, to participation in research on stigma and abortion provision, publication reviews, rural perspectives, and emerging issues. Video recordings of each meeting are then made available on the CERSH website.

[Access the meeting materials here](#)

Mpox Health Promotion for the Mallee

CERSH partnered with Swan Hill District Health to deliver a successful Nurse Practitioner-led Men's Sexual Health Clinic, providing inclusive, holistic care to an underserved rural population.

In partnership with Swan Hill District Health, CERSH supported the successful trial of a free, Nurse Practitioner-led Men's Sexual Health Clinic one of the few comprehensive sexual health services for men in a rural Victorian town. The initiative aimed to address long-standing barriers to access, reduce stigma, and provide confidential care to a frequently underserved population. Services included full sexual health assessments, education, prescribing, referrals, and access to MPOX vaccination.

Held fortnightly, the clinic ensured prompt care and continuity, with approximately 17 men accessing the service in the initial 10 weeks, generating over 43 follow-up appointments. Clients ranged in age from 17 to 81 years, with 82% identifying as male and 18% as transgender. Sixty-five percent underwent STI screening, of which 36% tested positive and received treatment. Opportunistic mental health support and contraception care including for transgender clients further highlighted the clinic's inclusive, holistic approach.

CERSH's support enabled a broad promotional campaign across social media, radio, print, and community engagement. Findings confirmed strong community need and high engagement, particularly among gender-diverse clients.



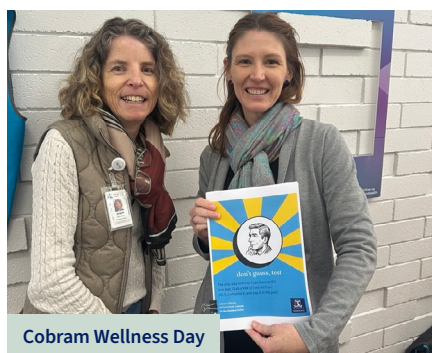
Community Events CERSH supported 2024-2025

Date	Event	Short description
4/9/24	Long Story Short Report Launch and Online Forum	The Long Story Short online forum brought together participants from across health, education, and community sectors to explore how we can improve access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services for women in the Loddon Mallee and Goulburn North East regions. Hosted by WHLM and WHGNE in partnership with CERSH, the session shared key findings from the Long Story Short project, which draws on local data, health expertise, and women's lived experiences.
13/9/24	ASHEFest	ASHEFest is a community event for schools in the Shepparton area to celebrate Aboriginal culture, held at Rumbalara FNC. A CERSH staff member attended ASHEFest to volunteer in the First Aid tent with other University of Melbourne staff. CERSH also shared sexual health resources with ASHE (including condoms, VACCHO pamphlets on STIs and BBVs and Young Deadly Free Posters on sexual health).
9/10/24	Ngar-Wu Wanyarra	In October, The University of Melbourne's Department of Rural Health hosted the 'Ngar-wu Wanyarra' Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Conference on Yorta Yorta Country. Ngar-wu Wanyarra – meaning to 'listen and act' in Yorta Yorta language – was a celebration of First Nation voices, knowledge and strength. The event provided a space to share information on key topics in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' health and wellbeing as well as engage in cultural activities like weaving and games. The CERSH stall showcased from-mob, for-mob and other essential sexual health resources. To find out more about the event, visit Ngar-wu Wanyarra 2024.
8/11/24	Out in the Open Mapping Rural Pride (GV)	On 8 November, CERSH supported LGBTIQ+ organisations and community members at the Goulbourn Valley 'Mapping Rural Pride' event, hosted at Uniting VicTas in Shepparton. This project, led by Rural Pride Australia is aiming to create a Rural Map or snapshot of what life is like outside the big smoke for LGBTIQ+ folk.
20/11/24	Trans Day of Remembrance	Trans Day of Remembrance is an annual event for community solidarity and remembrance. A day where, after a week of celebrating pride for Trans Awareness Week, we come together for a moment of solemn reflection. In Bendigo Trans and Gender Diverse Bendigo and Beyond (TGDBB), with support of Thorne Harbour Country, headspace Bendigo, Zoe Belle Gender Collective, Bendigo Pride Festival, YO Bendigo, and the City of Greater Bendigo, hosted a community engagement art installation at the Charing Cross Forecourt. Together, we remembered the trans people who have paved the way and those who have fought for trans liberation – a fight that is still ongoing.
17/1/25	Rumbalara Community Health Festival	On 17 January, Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative hosted a Community Health Festival on Yorta Yorta Country (Morooopna). The day was a celebration of community strength and connection, as well as an opportunity for folks to engage with health stalls, interactive activities and free pop-up clinics. CERSH joined with GV Health to host a sexual health stall, sharing Aboriginal sexual health resources, information and freebies.
14/2/25	National Condom Day	CERSH supported National Condom Day by providing links to resources, posters, and social media materials.
27/3/25	Bendigo Pride Festival	Volunteered with Bump-in across various venues, supporting the Festival Director.
9/4/25	STEM EDGE visit at DRH	STEM Edge is an initiative designed to inspire Yr7-12 girls and gender diverse students to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. As part of the program, DRH hosted a group of 30 metro Year 9 students in Shepparton for a camp. CERSH was invited to give an overview of the Centre, and two staff members were asked to present on their career journey and the pathway they took to working in rural health.
16/5/25	IDAHOBIT - Mildura	Attended planning meetings and contributed to planning. Shared SH resources for the SCHS SH stall. Connected committee chair to VicPol LGBTIQ+ Communities Portfolio Manager
27/6/25	Cobram Community Health 'Wellness Day'	Cobram Community Health hosted a Wellness Day at the Cobram Civic Centre attended by 70+ community members from the Moira Shire. The event focussed on general health and mental health and was an opportunity for CERSH to connect with local service providers including practice nurses, members of the health promotion and communications team at Nathalia, Cobram, Numurkah Health (NCN Health) and the director of Cobram Neighbourhood House. CERSH gave demonstrations of the STI-X self-collection kits. There was also interest from the Cobram Courier who interviewed CERSH about the STI-X Test Vending Machine project and published an article about the project in the following weeks publication.

Community Engagement

Meaningful community engagement is essential for building trust and fostering positive relationships in this portfolio of work. Supporting community events and actively 'showing up' demonstrates a genuine commitment to understanding and valuing each group's unique experiences and needs. It helps break down barriers, encourages open dialogue, and creates safe spaces where folks feel respected and heard.

By engaging in this way, we empower marginalised communities, promote inclusivity, and contribute to the development of more equitable and supportive environments for everyone. For improving sexual health outcomes, this approach is crucial because sex is often considered taboo or difficult to discuss. Building trust and meaningful relationships with communities lays the foundation for improved access to accurate information, resources and support, leading to better health outcomes and more informed decision-making regarding sexual health.



Sexual Health Month 2024

In September 2024, CERSH utilised the Sexual Health Month (SHM) initiative to bring together partners in a collaborative effort to improve sexual health outcomes. By harnessing established Communities of Practice, CERSH facilitated a range of localised sexual health promotion activities, aiming to raise awareness of STIs, provide SRH education, and promote sexual wellness. The activities undertaken met a number of objectives in our five Sexual Wellness Action Plans.

SHM activities included trivia nights, education sessions, student expos, and children's story times. SHM activities took place across multiple regional locations including schools, libraries, community and health settings.

An informal evaluation of participating stakeholders indicated the project increased awareness of STI risk, increased awareness of the importance of STI testing, increased dissemination of sexual health education and information to priority populations, and facilitated collaboration between local organisations. Stakeholders also reported CERSH's leadership of SHM planning, and provision of resources enabled execution of health promotion activities.

Events

- CERSH developed a toolkit to provide partners with SHM activity ideas and resources ('Our Health Promotion team found the September awareness dates very useful and utilised the book list and educational resources.' 'We utilised language from this toolkit, used some of the ideas from the toolkit and promoted it to our stakeholders for their use in the region.')
- Love your body sexual health expo for year 9 students ('We would love to host the Love Your Body expo again in 2025!')
- Library story times featured books on body safety and body image ('The children's booklist was really helpful for us in identifying books that we need to have in our collection. The flyers for parents were also fantastic.')
- Education sessions – student education, women's health sessions, service tours, teacher's workshop on how to teach RSE
- Sexual health themed trivia nights in Beechworth and Bendigo
- Long Story Short launch webinar
- Condom tree
- Condom vending machine wrapped in artwork designed by young people

'Thank you CERSH for your continual support, and dedication to expand networks and relationships between organisations! It has been great to connect with a larger number of organisations this year.'

'Keep up the high quality work and events as in 2024.'

More information on our Sexual Health Month activity can be found [here](#).



Organisers at the Sexual Health Trivia in Bendigo.



Love Your Body Event Organisers.

Using Comics to Break the Ice: Sexual Health with CALD Youth

Cartoons and comics are established as effective tools for health education particularly with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) youth due to their engaging and accessible nature. They are particularly effective as a tool for starting conversations and delivering health information on subjects that people might find challenging to discuss openly, like sex, sexuality and relationships. In 2024, CERSH developed a series of comics featuring young characters from CALD backgrounds as well as local landmarks from regional Victoria. Co-designed with youth workers, artists, and community partners in regional Victoria, the comics use empty speech and thought bubbles, making them versatile tools for interactive, youth-led conversations.

In 2025, community service providers in Shepparton partnered in piloting the comics with local CALD youth. As part of the implementation process, a training session was delivered by CERSH health promotion staff to introduce the comics, explore ways to use them effectively in youth work settings. Youth workers piloted the resources over a period of 8 weeks and provided qualitative feedback via a Qualtrics survey and videoconferencing interviews. While uptake during the pilot period was low, the comics were well received as a visual and interactive tool for engaging CALD youth in conversations about sexual health. The findings also indicate that the workforce needs access to further training and support to build confidence and skills in discussing sexual health – an insight that aligns with themes arising from published literature as well as rural and regional workforce consultations conducted by CERSH.



Wear It Purple Day – All-Gendered Fashion Parade and Pizza Party

Wear it Purple Day is an annual LGBTIQ+ awareness day especially for young people, based in Australia. Supporters wear purple to celebrate diversity and young people from the LGBTIQ+ community. On 30 August 2024, CERSH partnered with YO Bendigo, Thorne Harbour Country, headspace Bendigo, Goldfields Libraries and the City of Greater Bendigo to hold an all-ages, smoke, drug, vape and alcohol free, fully supervised 'All-Gendered Fashion Parade and Pizza Party' at the Bendigo library. Approximately 80 community members attended to enjoy the gender affirming clothes swap, walk /strut / groove down the catwalk, dance to music, enjoy pizza and drinks, visit the glitter / face paint / hair / make-up station and engage with the community organisations at educational stalls. The CERSH stall featured free condoms, resources on STIs, BBVs, condoms and consent, 'sexual health conversation starters', games, stickers, glitter and makeup. CERSH funded the drinks for the event, and a CERSH staff member helped plan and set up the event, staffed the sexual health stall, and provided supervision at the event.

Wear It Purple Day in Bendigo was a joyful celebration of diversity. Young people from the LGBTIQ+ community and allies felt safe and excited to dance, sing, try on new clothes and makeup and interact with other community members and support organisations.



Wear It Purple Day Organisers.

CERSH Articles & Presentations

Our Work 2024 – 2025

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

Peer-reviewed Publications

Moulton, Jessica E.; Arefadib, Noushin; Botfield, Jessica R.; Freilich, Karen; **Tomnay, Jane**; Bateson, Deborah; Black, Kirsten I.; Norman, Wendy V.; Mazza, Danielle., A nurse-led model of care to improve access to contraception and abortion in rural general practice: Co-design with consumers and providers., *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, February 2025

Ludwick, Teralynn, Walsh, Olivia, Cardwell, Ethan T., Fairley, Christopher K., **Tomnay, Jane**, Hocking, Jane S., Kong, Fabian Y. S., Health provider perspectives on establishing service linkages for treatment and follow-up from an Australian, web-based STI testing service: a qualitative study., *SEXUAL HEALTH*, February 2025.

Noonan, Anna; Millar, Erica; **Tomnay, Jane Elizabeth**; Luscombe, Georgina M; Black, Kirsten I., 'Imagine if we had an actual service...': A qualitative exploration of abortion access challenges in Australian rural primary care., *Rural and Remote Health*, July 2024

CERSH Reports

March, Karli , Kelly, Anne-Marie, Tomnay, Jane. Rural Sexual & Reproductive Health Skills Training Guide, May 2025.

Balardi, Jade., **Kelly, Anne-Marie, Tomnay, Jane.** Driving Change: Leadership, Collaboration & Impact- Embedding the Sexual Wellness Action Plan (SWAP) in the Mildura Communities of Practice- An impact evaluation., March 2025.

March, Karli, Kelly, Anne-Marie, Tomnay, Jane. Working towards sustainability: Rural Services Development Project, February 2025.

Presentations

Tomnay, Jane, Peisl, Marianne, HIV and Partner Notification; the lived experience, Medical Student Conference, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 23-26 June 2025

Bourke, Siobhan. Student Research Presentations Judging Panel, Medical Student Conference, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 23-26 June 2025

Bourke, Siobhan "I didn't even know what my vulva was." One novel way to teach vulva health to medical students., 27th World Association for Sexual Health Congress 2025, Brisbane, 16-19 June 2025.

Bourke, Siobhan, Tomnay, Jane. Creating a medical workforce competent in sexual and reproductive health care into the future., 27th World Association for Sexual. Health Congress 2025, Brisbane, 16-19 June 2025.

Kelly, Anne-Marie. Grassroots movements for collective future, 27th World Association for Sexual Health Congress 2025, Brisbane, 16-19 June 2025.

Colquhoun, Ashleigh, Kelly, Anne-Marie, Tomnay, Jane. Engaging Rural and Regional Communities in Sexual Health Month Activities, 27th World Association for Sexual Health Congress 2025, Brisbane, 16-19 June 2025.

Kelly, Anne-Marie. Mapping the road ahead: CERSH's Strategic Plan, SexRurality Conference, Shepparton, 11-12 June 2025

Bourke, Siobhan Sexual Health Across Clinical Contexts - Overview and student reflections, SexRurality Conference, Shepparton, 11-12 June 2025

Ware, Lauren, McGrath, Mitchell, Walsh, Oliva, Caldwell, Ethan T, **Tomnay, Jane, Evans, Dave, Kelly, Anne-Marie**, Ong, Jason J, Hocking, Jane S, Kong, Fabian YS, Ludwick, Teralynn. Implementing an online STI testing service for young people in rural and regional Victoria, Australia: Insights from local public health authorities, SexRurality Conference, Shepparton, 11-12 June 2025

Cheng, Solana, Temple-Smith, Meredith, Freilich, Karen, **Bourke, Siobhan.** General practitioners' perceived barriers and facilitators to patient delivered partner therapy for bacterial vaginosis in women who have sex with women. SexRurality Conference, Shepparton, 11-12 June 2025

Coppard, Miika, Corio, Ben, Evans, Dave. Using comics to break the ice: sexual health with CALD youth, SexRurality Conference, Shepparton, 11-12 June 2025

Kelly, Anne-Marie, Colquhoun, Ashleigh, Tomnay, Jane. Rural Australian grassroots movements for collective future, SexRurality Conference, Shepparton, 11-12 June 2025

March, Karli , Kelly, Anne-Marie, Tomnay, Jane. Working towards Sustainability Report, SexRurality Conference, Shepparton, 11-12 June 2025

Bourke, Siobhan, Tomnay, Jane. Creating a medical workforce competent in sexual and reproductive health care into the future, SexRurality Conference, Shepparton, 11-12 June 2025

Cowen, Kim, Kelly, Anne-Marie. STI-X Pilot: Phase Two, SexRurality Conference, Shepparton, 11-12 June 2025

Lim, Megan, Orozco, Ana, Turvey, Jake, **Evans, Dave**. The Gist: A pornography, sex, and relationships education program for young people, SexRurality Conference, Shepparton, 11-12 June 2025

Knowles, Heidi Lauren, Utiger, Jess, **Coppard, Miika**. Using the CERSH Opportunities Checklist to integrate sexual health promotion into the ASHE program on Yorta Yorta Country, SexRurality Conference, Shepparton, 11-12 June 2025

Kelly, Anne-Marie. Pathways to Pride: CERSH & BCHS Trans and Gender Clinic, Pathways to Pride Professional Development Series, DFFH Community Partnerships, Bendigo, May 2025

Bourke, Siobhan. Guest Speaker- Destigmatising women's sexual and reproductive health. Central Highlands Rural Health AGM, Trentham, 28 November 2024

Kelly, Anne-Marie, March, Karli. Rural Services Development Project. Department of Health - Women's Health Forum, Melbourne, 25 November 2024

Corio, Ben. Be Proud of your Choices 2: Increasing reach of sexual health promotion, International Union Against Sexually Transmitted Infections (IUSTI) World Congress, Sydney, 17-20 September 2024.

Evans, Dave, Kelly, Anne-Marie, Corio, Ben, Cowen, Kim, Fairley, Christopher K, Ludwick, Teralynn, Hocking, Jane S, **Tomnay, Jane**. STIX: Comprehensive STI testing via vending machines in rural and regional Victoria, Australia. International Union Against Sexually Transmitted Infections (IUSTI) World Congress, Sydney, 17-20 September 2024.

Kelly, Anne-Marie. Current Provision in Community Health Settings - Access to LARC and TOP Workshop, Department of Health Women's Health, Melbourne, 22 Aug 2024

Research Activity

CERSH staff were involved in the following activities throughout 2024-2025:

Research

1. CERSH evaluation of the pilot phase of the STI-X project, Evans, Dave, Cowen, Kim, Colquhoun, Ashleigh, Kelly, Anne-Marie, March, Karli, Tomnay, Jane.
2. CERSH Evaluation of Sexual Health Across Clinical Contexts. Bourke, Siobhan, Makleff, Shelly, Kelly, Anne-Marie, Tomnay, Jane.
3. The Centre of Research Excellence in Sexual and Reproductive Health for Women: Achieving Better Outcomes through Primary Care (SPHERE) Executive Advisory Group. Monash University, NH&MRC funded. (Jane Tomnay, Associate Investigator).
4. The Australian Contraception and Abortion Primary Care Practitioner Support (AusCAPPS) Network, NH&MRC funded; Monash. (Jane Tomnay, Associate Investigator).
5. The ALLIANCE (Quality Family Planning Services and Referrals in Community Pharmacy: Expanding Pharmacists' Scope of Practice) Trial Executive Committee (Jane Tomnay, Chief Investigator E).
6. Management of Chlamydia Cases in Australia (MoCCA project) Advisory Group. NH&MRC funded; University of Melbourne. (Jane Tomnay, Associate Investigator).
7. Novel strategies for improving syphilis testing and control. Led by Monash (Melbourne Sexual Health Centre) NH&MRC funded. (Jane Tomnay, Chief Investigator).
8. Peer-led Contact Tracing Project led by Health Equity Matters and The Burnet Institute. (Jane Tomnay, Member of Advisory Committee).

Working Groups (Professor Jane Tomnay)

World Health Organisation (WHO) Consolidated Guidelines on STI prevention and care; STI Guideline Development Group 2023 (ongoing).

World Health Organisation (WHO) implementation tool kit for network-based testing services including partner services and family and household testing across HIV, Hepatitis and STIs.

Member of the Victorian Department of Health, Departmental Advisory Committee for BBV and STIs.

Chair, Victorian Department of Health, Sexual Health subcommittee of the Departmental Advisory Committee for BBV and STIs.

Member of the University of Melbourne Department of Rural Health Executive Committee.

Member of Women's Health Victoria Abortion and Contraceptive Working Group.

Member of SPHERE AusCAPPS Executive Group.

Member of SPHERE ALLIANCE Executive Group.

Member of the Reproductive Justice Hallmark Research Initiative Steering Group.

Working Groups (Anne-Marie Kelly)

Victorian Mpox Expert Advisory Group

AIHW SRH monitoring framework (Stakeholder consultation)

Member of Greater Bendigo Rainbow Coalition

Working Groups (Associate Professor Siobhan Bourke)

Member of Royal Australasian College of Physicians Curriculum Review Group (CRG) for Sexual Health Medicine.

Member of Royal Australasian College of Physicians Training Committee for Sexual Health Medicine.

Australasian HIV&AIDS Conference and Australasian Sexual and Reproductive Health Conference- Executive organising committee member & Co-Chair of epidemiology, prevention and public health theme.

Member of the Victorian Department of Health Women's SRH Working Group.

Member of the Department of Medical Education Working Group for Clinical Scholar Discovery Subject, University of Melbourne.

Member of Women's Health Victoria Abortion and Contraceptive Working Group.

Member of the Department of Medical Education Student Code of Conduct Working Group.

Student Supervision (Professor Jane Tomnay)

Lennie Kim, Honours Student, University of Melbourne, Co-supervision- Mekleff, Shelly (Lead Supervisor), Tomnay Jane.

Mary Reema Antony, Community Fellows Program, University of Melbourne, Co-supervision- Tomnay Jane, Ludwick, Teralynn.

Student Supervision (Associate Professor Siobhan Bourke)

Solana Cheng, Fourth Year Medical Student, University of Melbourne, Co-supervision-Temple-Smith, Meredith, Bourke, Siobhan, Freilich, Karen.



Associate Professor Siobhan Bourke with The Hon. Mary Delahunt, Board Chair, at the Central Highlands Rural Health AGM. Image courtesy of Central Highlands Rural Health.

Partners & Collaborators

CERSH would like to thank their partners and collaborators.

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



Collaborators 2024/2025

1800 My Options, Women's Health Victoria

Alpine Shire

Bendigo & District Aboriginal Co-operative (BDAC)

Bendigo Pride

Chaffey Secondary School

City of Ballarat

City of Greater Bendigo

City of Greater Shepparton

Delkaya Health

Department of Education and Training

Gippsland Women's Health

GOTAFE

Goulburn Valley Public Health Unit

Griggmedia

GV Pride

headspace Bendigo

headspace Echuca

headspace Mildura

headspace National

headspace Swan Hill

Mallee District Aboriginal Services (MDAS)

Mallee Family Care

Mallee Sexual Assault Unit – Mallee Domestic Violence Services

Mitchell Shire Council

Njernda Aboriginal Corporation

Northern District Community Health

Resourcing Health and Education (RhED)

Robinvale District Health Services

Shepparton Medical Centre

Sexual Health Victoria (SHV)

SUNI Tafe

Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council

The Academy of Sport, Health and Education (ASHE)

Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO)

YO Bendigo



Get in touch with us



Get to know us better
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