Tele-testing in the ACT

A review of asymptomatic telehealth screening for sexually transmissible infections and blood borne viruses during the ACT COVID-19 lockdown.

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Introduction/Background

During the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) COVID-19 lockdown from August - December 2021, Canberra Sexual Health Centre (CSHC) limited face-to-face appointments to urgent and symptomatic care.

From 6th September 2021, telehealth consultations were offered for sexually transmitted infection (STI) and blood borne virus (BBV) screening for asymptomatic clients.

Approach

New and returning clients who contacted CSHC requesting asymptomatic screening were offered telehealth consultation. A telehealth consult was conducted and with client consent a pathology pack was posted to their nominated address with the following components:

- Instruction sheet on sample collection
- ACT Pathology Centre locations and opening times
- ACT Pathology request form
- Labelled urine jar, throat swab, rectal swab and/or vaginal swab.

Results

Demographics

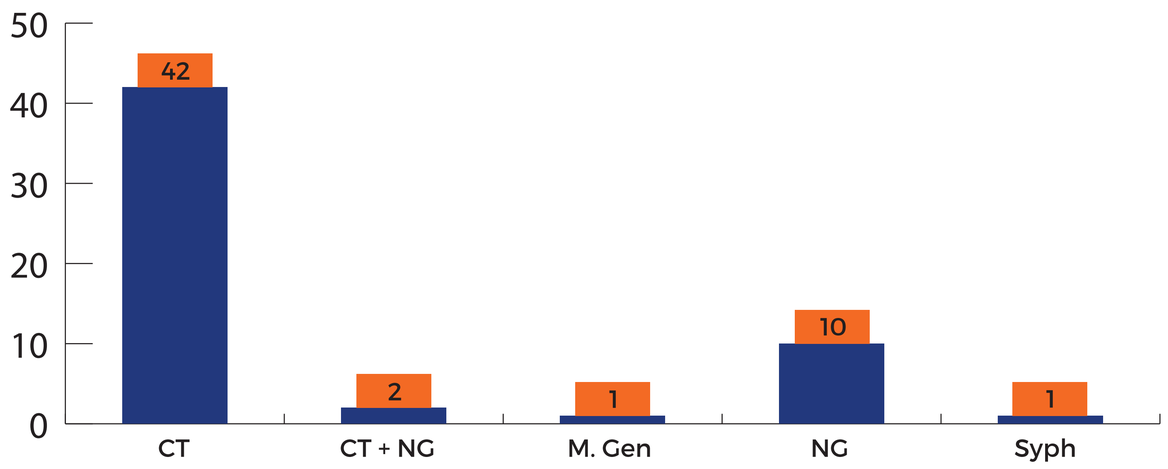
782 individuals had telehealth appointments, with a total of 798 consults provided between 6th September and 2nd December 2021.

Demographics (n=782)		
Age		
15-25	246	31%
26-35	316	40%
36-45	130	17%
46-55	57	7%
56-65	23	3%
66+	10	1%
Sex		
Female	232	30%
Male	550	70%
Sexual Preference		
Same sex	317	41%
Opposite sex	399	51%
Both sexes	66	8%
New or Returning Clients		
Returning clients	539	69%
New clients	243	31%
Met pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) eligibility criteria		
	350	45%

Testing Results

From 798 consultations, 659 (83%) STI and/or BBV screens were completed. We did not receive results for 139 (17%) testing kits that were sent, despite sending SMS reminders.

Of the 659 tests completed, 56 (8%) returned a positive result.



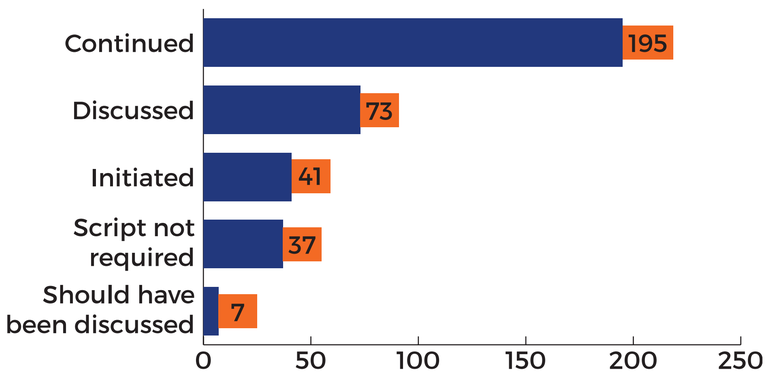
325/798 (41%) individuals were sent a satisfaction survey via SMS.

91/325 (28%) completed the survey.

- Of these 91 surveys, 77 (85%) respondents felt the care they received via telehealth was comparable with face-to-face consults.
- 81 (91%) respondents stated they would use telehealth again.

PrEP

PrEP Consultations



We provided 236 PrEP scripts over the reporting period. These scripts were faxed to the client's pharmacy. One issue with this was that some clients were not having testing done so we changed the process to faxing scripts once the results were received, instead of at the time of initial consult.

Conclusion

Telehealth provided a COVID-19 safe alternative for asymptomatic clients to have STI and BBV screening undertaken during the ACT COVID-19 lockdown. Telehealth has continued to be offered to asymptomatic clients since lockdown has ended, however uptake has been low, with most preferring face-to-face appointments.

Acknowledgement of Country
Canberra Health Services acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land, the Ngunnawal people. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and contribution to the life of this city and region.

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