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BACKGROUND

There is an ongoing outbreak of infectious syphilis affecting young Aboriginal adults in remote Australia. Since the outbreak was identified in the Kimberley (June 2014), Pilbara (February 2018) and Goldfields (January 2019) regions, there have been 236, 90 and 17 notifications, respectively (to the end of June 2019).

Prior to the outbreak there had been good control over syphilis in regional and remote areas for several years.

The Western Australian Syphilis Outbreak Response Group (WA SORG) was formed in August 2018 to coordinate the state-wide response to this outbreak.

Image 1: Characteristics of infectious syphilis outbreak cases in Aboriginal people in affected regions of WA, to 30 June 2019

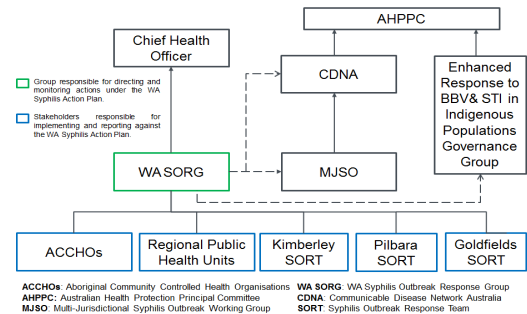
	Kimberley	Pilbara	Goldfields
Outbreak commencement	Jun 2014	Feb 2018	Jan 2019
Total number of cases	236	90	17
% cases reported in 15-29yr age group	70%	67%	68%
% Male / % Female	39% / 61%	49% / 51%	42% / 58%
Congenital cases, confirmed (probable)	0 (0)	1 (0)	0 (0)
Number of deaths in congenital cases	0	0	0

APPROACH

The aim of the WA SORG is to control the outbreak of syphilis among Aboriginal communities in WA using partnership strategies that, wherever possible, are applicable to the sustainable control measures for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and promotion of sexual health in Aboriginal communities.

The group is co-chaired by the WA Department of Health and the Aboriginal Health Council of WA (AHCWA). Membership is made up of government and Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Services (ACCHS) from across the state.

Image 2: WA SORG governance structure



The WA SORG is linked to relevant networks including the Multijurisdictional Syphilis Outbreak Working Group (MJSO), the (national) *Enhanced response addressing sexually transmissible infections (and blood-borne viruses) in Indigenous populations* Governance Group, and the Syphilis Outbreak Response Teams in the Pilbara, Kimberley and Goldfields.

OUTCOMES/IMPACT

The WA SORG has developed a *WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Action Plan* (the Action Plan) to guide activities at the state and regional level. Consultation was conducted with approximately 50 key stakeholders at a workshop in November 2018. A monitoring framework has also been developed to measure performance against key performance indicators.

Five priority areas have been incorporated into the Action Plan, in line with the (national) *Enhanced Response to Addressing Sexually Transmissible Infections (and Blood-borne Viruses) in Indigenous Populations*. Five working groups have been established to progress the actions under these priority areas in the Action Plan.

A number of key actions have been achieved by the WA SORG and working groups including:

- development of a Structured Administration Supply Arrangement (SASA) to allow Registered Nurses and Aboriginal Health Practitioners working in WA Country Health Services or Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS) to administer treatment for syphilis to suspected or confirmed cases and contacts
- preliminary work to establish a WA syphilis register
- development and distribution of regular communiques to provide updates on epidemiology and activities at the regional and state-wide level for stakeholders
- establishing point-of-care testing guidelines and protocols
- development of an online syphilis training module with other jurisdictions affected by the outbreak.
- provision of funding for outbreak affected regions to develop and implement localised strategies
- coordination of regular videoconferences to provide professional development, updates and information sharing
- development and distribution of targeted syphilis resources

Image 3: Priority areas from the WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Action Plan



INNOVATION AND SIGNIFICANCE

The WA SORG plays an integral role in the coordination of the state-wide response to the syphilis outbreak in partnership with regional health services, ACCHS and key stakeholders. The group works closely with established networks at the national and regional level to implement best practice approaches to control the outbreak.



Image 4: Syphilis poster developed by the WA Department of Health in partnership with AHCWA