

How are COVID-19 pandemic restrictions impacting sexual and reproductive health service provision and access? Preliminary findings from the Victorian Public Abortion and Contraception Tracker (VPACT) study.

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Presenting authors to be confirmed.

Background:

The COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions are impacting on the provision of essential sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services. This study, instigated by a coalition of key SRH organisations, examines the impacts of pandemic restrictions on public SRH service delivery in Victoria.

Methods:

This study includes a monthly cross-sectional survey of Victorian SRH providers' over five months and one-on-one interviews with a smaller sample of survey participants.

Results:

There were 37 round 1 survey responses from SRH providers. Respondents included nurses, nurse practitioners, GPs, obstetricians and gynaecologists, service managers and social, youth and health promotion workers. Organisations ranged across metropolitan, regional and rural Victoria. Respondents reported a range of observed trends in service demand during COVID-19. Forty-five percent and 56% reported an increased demand for medical and surgical abortions respectively. Just over half of respondents had no change in demand for IUDs, although 40% reported an increase in demand. Nearly one-third of respondents had received increased queries regarding extended use of long acting reversible contraceptives.

The most commonly reported areas in which organisations were impacted by COVID-19 restrictions were: maintaining clinical workforce capacity; provision of telehealth; access to adequate PPE; and maintaining organisational and administrative support. The three most common ways in which SRH services had changed working practices were: increased staff working from home; attaining additional resources for telehealth; and limiting the number of clients seen. Forty-two percent of respondents indicated their workplace had reduced staffing hours across the organisation. Importantly, over two-thirds had been able to network and collaborate with others outside of their organisation, proving beneficial in terms of sharing knowledge, strategies and protocols.

Conclusion:

Preliminary findings from survey Round 1 offer a valuable snapshot of trends and challenges in service delivery during the pandemic. Data collection will continue until late 2020.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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