

# **A PEER LED APPROACH TO ADDRESSING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH NEEDS IN VICTORIA**

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## **Background/Purpose:**

International students (IS) in Victoria have lower sexual and reproductive health (SRH) outcomes than the general community, especially regarding abortion. IS unique needs relate to their private health insurance conditions, knowledge of the Australian health system, knowledge around accessing SRH information and services, help seeking behaviours, and concerns around cultural barriers and stigma when accessing services. Lack of SRH knowledge potentially leads to delayed care and poorer outcomes for IS, with impacts on their visa and study outcomes. The COVID pandemic exacerbated these issues as IS were isolated with reduced access to financial supports. A strengths based, peer led approach used existing IS networks and support systems to address these issues by increasing IS knowledge of SRH, and improving access to services.

## **Approach:**

1800 My Options partnered with IS organisations to recruit participants for a survey and focus group discussions around accessing SRH information and services. A peer led approach fostered trust and ensured that IS perspectives incorporated into a strengths based strategy throughout the project, developing a culturally appropriate and sensitive health promotion intervention suitable for this cohort.

## **Outcomes/Impact:**

This project developed health promotion strategies to raise IS knowledge of and access to SRH services in Victoria. Using culturally appropriate communication and outreach designed to be acceptable and accessible to IS, this project addressed SRH knowledge, and enabled help seeking behaviours and SRH access.

## **Innovation and Significance:**

Providing IS with access to reliable information and trusted services ensures their SRH needs can be addressed promptly, preventing poorer health outcomes of delayed care. Boosting IS resilience and capacity to address SRH will ensure better health outcomes during future pandemics and emergencies.

**Disclosure of Interest Statement:** None