

## **CONNECT: Engaging CALD communities in rapid testing**

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### **Background**

In late 2021 Thorne Harbour Health and SAMESH, in partnership with SHINE SA, began piloting and evaluating the use of vending machines to dispense free Atomo HIV Self-Test (HST) kits to support rapid testing and to strengthen pathways to treatment and support.

### **Method, Innovation and Significance**

While the pilot project, which is being carried out in South Australia, builds on similar pilots implemented in the USA, the UK, and New Zealand, it differs in significant ways. Unlike previous pilots, CONNECT aims specifically to engage infrequent- and non-testers from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, in particular men who have sex with men, migrants, and international students. Consequently, CONNECT vending machines are located on university campuses as well as at Adelaide's oldest sex on premises venue. We have also worked closely with a Cultural Advisory Group throughout the development of the pilot, and have translated all supporting materials into Arabic, Chinese (simplified), Hindi, Indonesian, Malay, Vietnamese and Spanish.

### **Results**

Installed in mid-March 2022, in the first month of their operation the vending machines – which will remain in place for seven months - attracted over two hundred users, 47% of whom were overseas-born, and 74% of whom had never previously tested for HIV. While clearly demonstrating that the project is achieving its aims, the data collected regarding vending machine usage, webpage visitation, and the effectiveness of specific campaign materials, has also produced some unexpected results. It has, as this paper will outline, also raised important questions that will help to shape future initiatives.

### **Disclosure statement**

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