

Community-based HIV/STI testing is effective at reaching priority populations in New South Wales: an evaluation of a[TEST]

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Background:

a[TEST] is a community-based HIV/STI testing service for gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (GBMSM) in NSW. a[TEST] is a partnership between ACON and Sydney Sexual Health Centre, RPA Sexual Health and Kirketon Road Centre. An evaluation of the service was performed to assess: (1) access by target populations; (2) the contribution of a[TEST] to HIV testing numbers in NSW; and (3) client satisfaction and reasons for using the service.

Methods:

De-identified clinical data were extracted via the Australian Collaboration for Coordinated Enhanced Surveillance of Sexually Transmissible Infections and Blood-borne Viruses from 1st January 2015 to 31st December 2019. Client satisfaction was assessed via 638 surveys at the largest a[TEST] site between 2015-2019.

Results:

During the study period, there were 29,268 unique clients and 42,370 total visits to a[TEST] sites. 16407 (56.8%) clients were born overseas and 7126 (24.7%) clients were Asian-born. 36,956 HIV tests were performed with a positivity rate of 0.4%, accounting for 1.3% of all HIV tests performed in NSW during the study period. 162 clients were diagnosed with HIV, accounting for 13.4% of diagnoses in GBMSM and 19.9% of diagnoses in overseas-born GBMSM in NSW. 615 (98%) respondents to the client satisfaction reporting being satisfied with the service. The convenient location and free cost were consistently reported as the main reason for using a[TEST].

Conclusion:

Despite accounting for 1.3% of HIV tests in NSW, a[TEST] captured a substantial proportion of GBMSM diagnoses, including one in five overseas-born GBMSM. This suggests that a[TEST] effectively reaches at-risk GBMSM, particularly Asian-born GBMSM who bear a disproportionate burden of newly-diagnosed HIV. Our results support community-based HIV/STI testing as a public health strategy to increase access to testing among GBMSM and the most at-risk subpopulations within this group.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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