

“Part of Their Body, Part of Their Wellbeing”: Tertiary Education Providers’ Views on Sexual Health Initiatives for International Students

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Background:

Previous studies on knowledge of and access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) among international students (IS) in Australia often overlooked tertiary education providers’ (TEPs) perspectives. This study aimed to explore their views, compare and contrast them with IS’ opinions, and identify opportunities whereby TEPs can provide SRH information to IS.

Methods:

Participants were recruited from various TEPs (universities, English language schools, and TAFEs) in Victoria. Fifteen in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews with staff (teaching, administrative, and health professionals), and a focus group with seven IS (diploma, undergraduate, and postgraduate) were conducted between September to November 2022. A reflexive thematic analysis was used to identify and refine themes that emerged from the interviews.

Results:

Both staff and students agreed that TEPs should play an active role in providing IS with SRH information. However, some staff felt that they did not have the knowledge, resources, and confidence to talk about SRH. Participants stated that both Federal and State governments have a responsibility to fund and support SRH initiatives specific to IS. Possible opportunities include activities during student orientation, outreach programs involving peer educators, a knowledge hub that can be shared through TEPs’ websites, student portals, and social media platforms, and an SRH training program for TEPs. Participants reported such initiatives could increase both TEPs and IS’ knowledge of SRH, with some potential benefits including a reduction of SRH stigma for both staff and students, an increase in STIs and HIV awareness, and a reduction in unplanned pregnancy among IS.

Conclusion

The study concludes that TEPs should play an active role in providing SRH information to IS as part of their responsibility to ensure IS’ overall health and wellbeing during their study in Australia, and that such initiatives need to be properly funded and supported by the government as a public health strategy.

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