MORE INFECTIONS BUT LESS RISK: UNPACKING THE SEXUAL HEALTH NEEDS OF MEDICARE-INELEGIBLE GAY, BISEXUAL AND OTHER MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN ATTENDING MCLINIC IN PERTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Authors: Staniszewski J\(^1\), Ryan, K\(^{2,3}\), Asselin J\(^2\), Marshall L\(^4\), Murray, S\(^4\), Hellard M\(^{2,3,5}\), Stoove M\(^{2,5}\).
1 MClinic, WA Aids Council, West Perth, WA
2 Burnet Institute, Melbourne, VIC
3 Department of Infectious Diseases, Alfred Health, Melbourne, VIC
4 South Terrace Clinic, WA Health, Fremantle, WA
5 School of Preventive Medicine and Population Health, Monash University, Melbourne, VIC

Background: Australian data suggests increased burden of HIV among overseas-born gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (GBM), raising concerns regarding access to prevention and clinical services due to Medicare-ineligibility. MClinic is a state-funded sexual health clinic providing services irrespective of Medicare eligibility. We describe demographics, sexual behaviour and HIV and STI positivity among GBM attending MClinic by Medicare eligibility.

Methods: Linked self-completed behavioural and HIV/STI testing data was extracted from MClinic from July 2017 to March 2019. Medicare eligibility was defined if patients were born in Australia, in a country with a reciprocal agreement, or born in any other country and residing in Australia for ≥3 years. Medicare-ineligible was defined as born in a country without a reciprocal agreement and residing in Australia for ≤3 years. Chi-squared tests were performed; significance <0.05.

Results: 5463 surveys among 2340 individuals, of which 195 (8.3%) were Medicare-ineligible, were included in the analysis. Approximately two-thirds (64.1%) of Medicare-ineligible GBM were aged ≤30 years compared to 38.5% of Medicare-eligible, p<0.01. Compared to Medicare-eligible GBM, fewer Medicare-ineligible GBM reported >10 anal sex partners in the previous six months (7.4%; 15.3%, p<0.01), inconsistent condom use with casual partners (42.3%; 65.0%, p<0.01) and drug use during sex (37.0%; 54.2%, p<0.01). Reporting a previous HIV test and current pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) use was also lower among Medicare-ineligible GBM; 81.5%; 88.8% (p<0.01) and 6.6%; 26.1% (p<0.01), respectively. Compared to Medicare-eligible GBM, positivity among Medicare-ineligible GBM was higher for HIV (2.3%; 0.1%, p<0.01), chlamydia (10.9%; 6.9%, p<0.01) and was comparable for syphilis (p=0.3) and gonorrhoea (p=0.4).

Conclusion: Despite fewer reporting high-risk behaviours, HIV and chlamydia positivity is higher among Medicare-ineligible GBM. Coupled with lower uptake of testing and PrEP, this highlights particular vulnerabilities among this population in Western Australia and a need for enhanced focus on service and prevention access.

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