Local Councils Supporting Public Access to Condoms for Rural Young People

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Objectives
- Increase STI testing rates in at-risk groups in rural Victoria
- Strengthen workforce capacity to improve access to confidential, high quality, clinical sexual health services
- Enhance activity in 'evidence supported' co-ordinated sexual health promotion, workforce development and knowledge sharing
- To improve sexual health systems and health promotion practices by supporting planning, implementation and evaluation of rural sexual health initiatives
- Translate CERSH findings and achievements throughout the region and the State

Relevance
- The Third National Sexually Transmissible Infections Strategy 2014-2017 identifies that Chlamydia is the most frequently reported notifiable infection in Australia. Population notification rates continue to rise and young people are disproportionately affected with more than 80 per cent of these occurring in people under 29 years of age. Particular groups with very high notification rates include females, those aged 15–19 years, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, and people residing in regional and remote locations. (1)
- Twenty-four hour access to condoms for young people living in rural Victoria is problematic for many reasons, including the fact that condom vending machines (CVMs) are often located in venues and places they cannot access. Issues of privacy, lack of transport, and cost have also been identified as key barriers.

Context
- Between 2010 and 2012 CERSH piloted a project with Local Government Agencies (LGAs) in the Hume region to install condom vending machines in publically accessible locations. The outcome of this project was an increase in twenty four hour access to affordable condoms in the localities of Campaspe, Strathbogie and City of Greater Shepparton. The project evaluation concluded that CVMs installed in rural towns in north-east Victoria are accessible to young people after business hours, are cost-effective for councils and have not generated any complaints from residents. (2)
- In 2015 CERSH extended the project to invite LGAs in the Loddon Mallee region to partner with CERSH to install CVMs.

Methods
- Four of the six LGAs in Loddon Mallee region approached agreed to partner with CERSH and develop a formal Memorandum of Understanding to install the CVMs in their communities.
- All LGAs are responsible for the regular checking of machines, maintenance and provision of monthly data.
- CERSH has provided funds for four CVMs and the first 2,000 condoms to each LGA. In total 16 CVMs have been installed in the Loddon, Gannawarra, Buloke and Greater City of Bendigo LGAs.
- 8,000 condoms have been supplied in vending packs with sexual health service information inserts. The inserts were created for each LGA and based on a Swan Hill resource (3). These were added to the vending pack by suppliers.
- Each LGA undertook their own process of community consultation or assessment to determine the location, management and ongoing maintenance of the CVMs. CERSH encouraged LGAs to locate the CVMs in their smaller townships where barriers to accessing condoms are likely to be more significant.
- CERSH offered resources to working parties to involve local young people in projects to promote condom availability and display key messages around the use of condoms in the prevention of STIs.
- The Greater City of Bendigo, Youth media team and CERSH trialled a visual arts workshop to create posters and images for social media promotion.
- CERSH is providing planning and evaluation support to document the range of approaches.

Location of CVM installed by CERSH and LGAs.

Shire of Buloke: CVM locations - Donald, Birchip, Wycheproof and Charlton.
Shire of Gannawarra: CVM locations - Kerang, Koowarrabilla, Litchfield, Cohuna.
Shire of Loddon: CVM locations - Wedderburn (2) and Boom (2).
Greater City of Bendigo: CVM locations - Heathcote, Elmore and Central Bendigo (2).

Results
- Four shires have installed CVMs to increase access to condoms.
- The LGA consultations indicated a willingness to address local barriers to accessing condoms in their community.
- No notable negative feedback has been received by local residents, media or young people since instalment of CVMs.

Conclusion
- Some of the key characteristics which enabled participation in the instalment of CVMs and community working parties included existing partnerships and networks, sexual health identified as a previous or current priority, and the involvement of managers and high level decision makers.
- Some of the operational constraints identified by this project include the outsourcing of management and maintenance of the LGAs public amenities, the staff allocation for coordinating and reporting, the multiple roles staff undertake over large geographic regions, funding constraints and no previous sexual health initiatives.

Acknowledgements
CERSH would like to acknowledge all the community agencies and local government agencies in the Loddon Mallee region that have been working in partnership on this project.

References:
(2) Tomnay JE and Hatch B. Council Working with CVMs.
(3) Safer sex in the sticks and beyond Final report, 2017, November.
(4) Swan Hill District Health Services Safer sex in the sticks and beyond Final report, November 2012.