

Partnerships improving rural women's sexual health

Issue 3 March 2014

Acknowledging Key Partners: The Royal Women's Hospital
Family Planning Victoria
Grampians Medicare Local
Ballarat Community Health

welcome

Women's Health Grampians (WHG) along with our key partners have been developing regional partnerships seeking to increase women's access to timely and appropriate family planning services in the Grampians region. By publishing this quarterly newsletter we aim to inspire ideas and action to improve rural women's sexual and reproductive health.

We welcome your feedback, contribution and collaboration to both this newsletter and developing regional partnerships.

regional update

In January Women's Health Grampians have been reviewing regional indicators of sexual and reproductive health including participation in pap screening and chlamydia rates.

The Grampians Medicare Local (GML) Community Needs Analysis Report stated an ongoing concern that a significant proportion of women in the GML region may not participate in cervical screening programs.

Pap screening rates for 2012 have recently been released showing the Grampians region (57.6%) recorded one of the lowest screening rates in Victoria.

- 8 of our 11 LGA's have screening rates lower than Victoria
- 3 LGA's ranked in the bottom 10 LGA's within the state, and
- 5 LGA's are in the bottom 20

The annual statistical report by the Victorian Cervical Cytology Registry (VCCR) highlights the work of our pap test nurses who completed 4046 tests in 2012, an increase of 152% over the past 5 years. While the Grampians region has the lowest number of pap test nurses,

as a group they recorded the 2nd highest percentage of regional tests in the state.

Typically barriers for rural women's participation in cervical screening are: confidentiality, convenience and cost.

Rates of participation in pap screening is an example of health behaviour, giving us some insight into potentially unmet sexual health needs within our region.

To understand more about women's access to services our partnership group is currently planning work to map the sexual health services available within our region.

We will use this information to develop a regional referral guide for sexual health.

If you would like to be involved in this consultation or have any information relating to sexual health services within our region we would be very happy to hear from you.

Please contact Shannon Hill on 5322 4100 or email shannon@whg.org.au

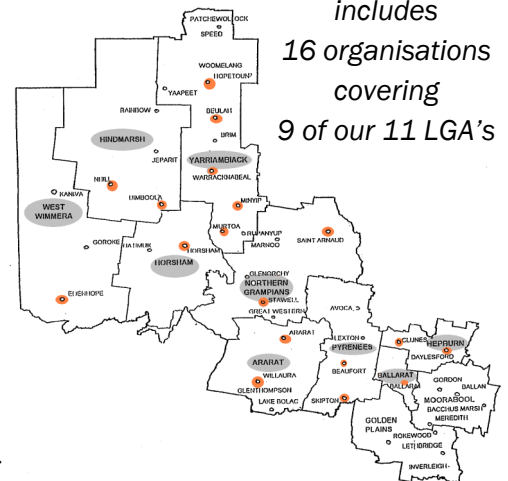
Pap Screening Participation Rates

Recently released data shows 8 of our 11 LGA's have lower participation in pap screening than Victoria including:

WEST WIMMERA	47.7%
NTH GRAMPIANS	51.6%
YARRIAMBIAICK	53.5%
GRAMPIANS	57.6%
VICTORIA	60.0%

Source: [VCCR Annual Statistical Report 2012](#)

Our network includes 16 organisations covering 9 of our 11 LGA's



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'as a member of the NYSC I can advocate for young people living in rural and remote areas of Australia'

*Paigen Horwood
School Nurse
Stawell Secondary College*

strategies in the Grampians region

Working across the region we often learn about initiatives improving women's sexual wellbeing. This is an opportunity to profile excellent work underway locally.

National Youth Sexual Health Council

Youth Empowerment Against HIV/AIDS (YEAH) was founded in 2005 as an Australian youth driven health promotion organisation dedicated to supporting the involvement and ownership of people aged 15-29 to lead HIV/AIDS and sexual health awareness in their local communities.

To reinforce the importance of putting young people in positions of leadership at every level of decision-making within their organisation and also at a policy level, YEAH established a National Youth Sexual Health Council (NYSC).

The aim of the NYSC is to provide a national platform for a diverse representation of young people's voices. 20 young Australians will take the lead in broadening the base of public support for sexual health and ensuring young people are getting the information they need to make healthy choices.

Paigen Horwood, School Nurse at Stawell Secondary College is taking part in the council, working with young people from diverse backgrounds; from every state and territory, with a mix of people with

prior experience in youth organisations, professionals, newcomers and students.

Paigen is excited to be able to contribute to the brilliant work that YEAH are already doing in promoting sexual health and creating positive community awareness! She hopes that as a member of the council she can advocate for young people living in rural and remote areas of Australia and improve the exposure they have to sexual health programs and events.

Paigen has acted as the sub committee spokesperson to organise the International Condom Day event on 14 February. International Condom Day (not-so?) coincidentally falls on Valentine's Day - a great opportunity to join messages of healthy relationships, love, dating, safe sex and barrier method use.

Held in Darwin, Adelaide and Melbourne the event was small flash mobs that circulated health promotion messages and material about safe sex and condoms. All those who participated reported a fun and successful event.

If you work with young people or just want to learn more about sexual health and sexual education YEAH have collated a host of youth friendly resources covering sexual health topics including HIV, STIs and sexuality. All content has a focus on things that are relevant to Australia and young people. You can find their website at: <http://www.redaware.org.au/>



Empowering young Australians to prevent the spread of HIV and other STIs through participation and leadership



strategies outside the region

Sharing knowledge of sexual health strategies underway outside our region aiming to inspire ideas locally.

Council-supported condom vending machines: are they acceptable to rural communities?

For some time there have been calls for greater access to condoms for young people. Issues of privacy, lack of service provider choice, transport and cost are barriers that prevent rural young people from accessing condoms.

The Centre for Excellence in Rural Sexual Health (CERSH) have completed a study to explore viability, cost-effectiveness and acceptability of accessible condom vending machines in rural towns.

By highlighting the public health implications of increasing chlamydia rates and consequences of untreated infections CERSH

secured partnerships with three local government councils in North East Victoria.

Each council installed four condom vending machines in locations that were very accessible to young people after business hours. Councils regularly checked the machines, refilled the condoms, retrieved the money and captured basic usage information.

Over 12 months 1153 condoms were purchased, generating \$2626.10. The study has demonstrated that there was no negative feedback from residents, no negative reporting by local media, and that condom vending machines were used regularly and generated revenue.

On average the cost of the machines were recouped within 18 months. Any revenue after this time was profit, ensuring sustainability.

The full article was published in the Sexual Health Journal on 28 June 2013.

'restrictions to confidentiality when it comes to your sex life are hard to comprehend for city-dwellers who have access to endless chemist and supermarket counters.'

*Associate Professor
Jane Tomnay
CERSH*

links to research or resources

Australian Women's Health Network Women and Sexual & Reproductive Health Position Paper 2012

AHWN's position paper makes recommendations for action to improve sexual and reproductive health outcomes for women.

There are seven key areas covered including:

- developing women's health literacy
- increasing reproductive choice
- improving prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections
- equipping the health workforce to better respond to women's health needs

<http://www.awhn.org.au/display.php?>



"Women are significantly more likely to experience sexual violence, take the major role in contraceptive decision making and have sole responsibility for pregnancy."

professional development

Public Health Association Australia

2nd National Sexual & Reproductive Health Conference | 18-19 November

PHAA recently announced intentions to hold a second national sexual and reproductive health conference later this year in Melbourne.

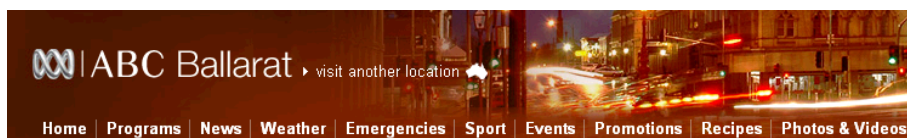
Call for abstracts submissions will close 25 June 2014. [Keep an eye on their website for news about the conference program.](#)

The 1st national conference held in 2012 developed a proclamation outlining ten key action areas to advance sexual and reproductive wellbeing in Australia. This document can also be useful when considering our sexual health priorities locally: http://www.phaa.net.au/documents/130322_Melbourne%20Proclamation%20FINAL.pdf



PHAA 2nd National Sexual & Reproductive Health Conference
18-19 NOVEMBER 2014

in the media



4 December, 2013 8:57AM AEDT

What is it about section 8? Abortion law debate fires up

By Lily Partland

The abortion debate reignites as independent MP Geoff Shaw signals his intention to draft a private member's bill to remove a controversial section of the Abortion Law Reform Act.

Women's Health Grampians were recently asked to comment on the merits of section eight of the Abortion Law Reform Act.

Patty Kinnersly, Chief Executive

Officer, said the act is a very solid piece of legislation. "Victoria's not a state that tosses and frots with legislation on the whim of a few doctors that are unhappy, we're confident it will remain."

People opposed to section 8 see independent MP Geoff Shaw's intention to draft a private members bill to remove this clause from the Act as a test case of the state's abortion law. Ms Kinnersly says it's an extreme case that is a distraction from the main issue: giving women access to services.

"It's important to protect women and women's rights. What we want from our GPs is to give us accurate medical attention and care, we don't go and see them for moral and ethical support."

<http://www.abc.net.au/local/audio/2013/12/03/3903983.htm?§ion=news>

- (a) inform the woman that the practitioner has a conscientious objection to abortion; and
- (b) refer the woman to another registered health practitioner in the same regulated health profession who the practitioner knows does not have a conscientious objection to abortion.

Subsection (1) does not apply to a practitioner who is under a duty set out in subsection (3)

A Matter Of Conscience and Choice:

On 6 December 2013 The Courier published an article by State Labor Member for Ballarat West, Sharon Knight, on the importance of conscience to the debate around abortion laws.

Ms Knight said "As it stands, if a woman seeking an abortion consults with a doctor who has a moral objection to abortion, then that doctor must refer the woman to another medical practitioner."

"I believe that the law in Victoria in regard to abortion reflects the view of the majority of people in our state. I support the law as it stands today because I believe it is a woman's right to determine what happens to her body."

"The current laws strike a balance between a medical practitioner's right to exercise their conscience and that same right held by women seeking an abortion."

The full article is available at: <http://www.sharonknight.com.au/media-releases/a-matter-of-conscience-and-choice/>

Please contact Women's Health Grampians if you would like to contribute ideas or feedback to this newsletter

Grampians Region: overcoming barriers for rural women accessing family planning services

Women's Health Grampians along with our key partners have been holding discussions about how to support regional services to improve women's sexual and reproductive health across the Grampians region.

Our focus is on family planning including contraception, pregnancy counselling, abortion and the professional development needs of service providers.

We readily acknowledge that many organisations across the region have a long history of working hard to address these issues. With this in mind the aim is to build on existing relationships, and develop new connections, to enhance current work, add capacity, and where relevant, provide a new range of initiatives.

We welcome opportunities to consider the sexual and reproductive health issues for women in our region.



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