

Sexual Health Ministerial Advisory Committee

Communiqué – August 2021

Preamble

Sexual Health Ministerial Advisory Committee

The Sexual Health Ministerial Advisory Committee (Committee) was established to provide advice to the Minister for Health and Ambulance Services on sexual and reproductive health-related matters in the context of the *Queensland Sexual Health Strategy 2016–2021* (Strategy) and associated action plans. The Committee is scheduled to meet quarterly.

Sexual Health Research Fund and Research Sub-Committee

The Sexual Health Research Fund (SHRF) was established to provide seed funding for translational research activities to improve the delivery of sexual health services in Queensland and support implementation of the Strategy. The Research Sub-Committee (RSC) is a subset of the Committee and is convened to set research priorities and assess and recommend research applications.

This communiqué provides an overview of major items discussed at the fourteenth Committee meeting held on 26 August 2021.

Committee meeting overview

A final update was received on the implementation progress of the *North Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sexually Transmissible Infections Action Plan 2016–2021* (Action Plan), which was officially completed in June 2021. Positive outcomes noted in the evaluation of the five year Action Plan included: zero cases of congenital syphilis in 2019–2020; decreasing rates of syphilis, chlamydia and gonorrhoea; increased rates of testing and treatment; improved access to STI prevention measures such as all hours condom access across 50 sites; and the roll-out of robust clinical guidelines for syphilis in pregnancy and for STI testing in youth. The Committee noted emerging issues relating to congenital syphilis presentations in central Queensland, which is outside the geographical area covered by the Action Plan, and was supportive of North Queensland Hospital and Health Services (HHS) sharing their expertise in assisting Central Queensland HHS to respond to these issues. The Action Plan replacement is currently under a codesign process.

The Committee discussed its upcoming annual stakeholder engagement events: the North West First Nations Sexual Health Workshop for Service Providers to be held in Mt Isa on Thursday 7 October 2021; and the North Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sexual Health Forum to be held in Townsville on Friday 15 October 2021.

UPDATE: At the time of publication, the Committee had taken the reluctant decision to postpone these events for the foreseeable future, due to workforce and other impacts caused by the COVID-19 vaccination imperative across Queensland. It is the Committee's intention that the event(s) will be reactivated when circumstances are more enabling.

The Committee considered the upcoming fourth round of the SHRF, endorsing the proposed timeline for the round (scheduled to open in November 2021), and noting the upcoming meeting of the Research Sub-Committee to discuss and identify appropriate research priorities.

The Committee received presentations on the draft *Queensland Sexual Health Strategy 2016-2021: Final Progress Report 2019-2021* (Final Progress Report) and the draft *Queensland Sexual Health Framework* (Framework). The current time-limited Strategy concludes in December 2021. The Committee noted that the Final Progress Report highlighted the breadth of needs, issues, activities and partnerships required to make a positive impact in sexual health, and showcased the efforts and progress made in the period 2019-2021 by the Committee, the Department and their partners. Following publishing approval, the Final Progress Report will be accessible on the public-facing Strategy webpage (link below). The Committee also noted that from 2022, the proposed Framework will replace the Strategy as the whole-of-government position statement on improving sexual health for all Queenslanders, with further detailed activities articulated in the underpinning Action Plans. The Committee accepted an invitation to provide feedback on the draft Framework, noting that whilst consultation is intended to be limited, further targeted sector feedback would be sought in due course. The Committee also reaffirmed their continued support following approval for a further three-year Committee term from January 2022.

The Committee received a presentation from True Relationships and Reproductive Health (formerly Family Planning Queensland) on the progress-to-date of the *Relationship Ready Program*; the 'teaching the teachers' relationships and sexuality education program that was commissioned as a direct outcome from the Committee's Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health Forum in 2018. The Committee noted that there had been extensive engagement with the Department of Education in developing the program, and that a recent program extension had enabled the development of further phases, including development of a consent framework and support for teachers managing sexualised behaviours in school-settings.

Relationship Ready resources for educators and parents and carers can be accessed here – <https://www.true.org.au/relationship-ready>

The Committee received an update on the recent *Syphilis in South East Queensland* online forum hosted by Communicable Diseases Branch and discussed the national focus on dealing with infectious and congenital syphilis and considerations for improved state-based clinical incident management of the latter.

The next Committee meeting is scheduled for **11 November 2021**.

More information on the Queensland Sexual Health Strategy and Sexual Health Ministerial Advisory Committee can be found at [Queensland Health Sexual Health Strategy](#) or contact us via email: SexualHealthStrategy@health.qld.gov.au