

Communiqué

June 2022

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 (Minister), when requested by the Minister, on sexual and reproductive health-related matters in the context of the *Queensland Sexual Health Framework* (Framework) and associated action plans. The Committee provides advice based on current available evidence. To remain current with sector issues and emerging areas of potential advice, the Committee receive presentations and briefings on a range of matters. Core to their remit, the Committee is not a lobbyist body or an advocacy group. 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 Framework. The Research Sub-Committee (RSC) is a subset of the Committee and was convened to set research priorities and assess and approve research applications.

The Committee was formally appointed for their third term on 30 March 2022. Prior to this, the Committee met informally on 24 February 2022 for the purpose of information sharing, honouring the scheduled presentations and briefings. This Communiqué provides an overview of major items discussed at this sixteenth informal meeting, at the seventeenth Committee meeting held on 2 June 2022, and the Research Sub-Committee meeting held on 23 May 2022.

Committee meetings overview

24 February 2022

The third term of the Committee welcomed new Members Dr Kylie Stephen and Dr Diane Rowling. Dr Stephen has expertise in violence prevention, and expertise in issues affecting women, and was previously an Ex-Officio Committee Guest. Dr Rowling has expertise in public and sexual health medicine and was invited to join the Committee following the resignation of Dr Graham Neilsen at the conclusion of the Committee's second term. During the February 2022 meeting, Committee Members joined the Chair in acknowledging and thanking Dr Neilsen for his contribution to the Committee since its inception.

The Committee received presentations on current progress and recommendations from the Sexual Health Clinical Network Workgroups on Contact Tracing, Nurse Credentialling and Authorisation, and Service Mapping. The Cairns Sexual Health Service also gave a presentation on their approach to improving culturally safe practice around unplanned pregnancy and termination of pregnancy and to reducing service barriers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



2 June 2022

On the 23 May 2022 the Committee Chair Emeritus Professor Cindy Shannon AM met with the Hon Julianne Gilbert MP, Assistant Minister for Health and Regional Health Infrastructure. During this meeting the Committee's advice was requested on the decriminalisation of mandatory testing for sex workers, currently being considered within the Queensland Law Reform Commission's review of state sex work legislation. At the June 2022 Committee meeting Members noted there is no health evidence of higher rates of blood borne virus or sexually transmissible infection (BBV/STI) among sex workers and discussed sexual health in sex workers being treated as an issue of criminality rather than a harm reduction priority or health response.

The Committee received an update on the North Queensland STI Action Plan, focusing on influencers of epidemiological trends, including: low/reduced notification rates reflecting limited services and/or low testing rates; increased testing rates may reflect subsequent increased notification rates; and good management of and significant responses to identified outbreaks will be reflected in subsequent rate reductions.

The Committee received an update on the emerging issue of Monkeypox (MPX), noting MPX is not considered an STI, and available evidence does not support this classification. Many cases of MPX globally are associated with gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (GBMSM). The Committee discussed concerns around the risk of stigma and discrimination against GBMSM and noted work occurring at both state and national levels aimed at proactively addressing the risks of stigma and misinformation. More information about MPX is available on the [Queensland Health website](#).

The Committee received an epidemiological presentation examining the impact of geographic remoteness which appears to be an indicator of BBV/STI notification rates among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Committee noted concerns about the high rates of Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the possible association of this with high rates of incarceration and lack of knowledge regarding safer injecting practices. Declining HIV rates were positively noted, emphasising the need to continue the effective relevant health promotion, prevention and treatment strategies. The Committee discussed the issue of remoteness, considered to indicate reduced access to sexual health services and care.

The Committee discussed their annual stakeholder engagement forum (Forum) which was necessarily postponed in 2020 and 2021 due to impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2022 Forum is proposed to be held in Mount Isa in late 2022, focusing on sexual health service systems for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers and communities within North West Queensland.

The next Committee meeting is scheduled for **25 August 2022**.

Research Sub-Committee Meeting Overview

The RSC met on 23 May 2022 to discuss and assess applications received for Round 4 of the SHRF. At the June 2022 Committee meeting, the RSC discussed their funding recommendations for SHRF Round 4 applications noting some recommendations as provisional, pending the RSC's further assessment of requested additional information. The Committee endorsed the RSC's recommendations and delegated final decision-making and recommendations for SHRF Round 4 applications to the RSC.

More information on the SHRF can be found at [Queensland Sexual Health Research Fund](#).

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