

# Queensland Sexual Health Strategy 2016–2021

Progress report 2019–2021



# The government's investment in optimal sexual and reproductive health

The Queensland Government invested funding of more than \$5.27 million over four years (2016–17 to 2019–20) to progress priority actions in the Queensland Sexual Health Strategy 2016–2021 (Strategy).

A significant proportion of this initial investment was provided to Hospital and Health Services, to boost the sexual health service workforce and from 2019–20 onwards, this funding was built into their core budgets.

The Department administers around \$750,000 per annum of Strategy funding to continue to progress and enhance priority activities identified by the Strategy and the Committee.

The Strategy provides the overarching scaffold for action and is supported by the:

- *Queensland Hepatitis B Action Plan 2019–2022*
- *Queensland Hepatitis C Action Plan 2019–2022*
- *Queensland HIV Action Plan 2019–2022*
- *Queensland STI Action Plan 2019–2022*
- *Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander BBV and STI Action Plan 2019–2022*
- *North Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sexually Transmissible Infections Action Plan 2016-2021.*

The Strategy is a whole-of-government policy statement that aims to support healthy and safe sexual experiences and optimal sexual and reproductive health and provide a service system that is responsive to the needs of all Queenslanders.

# Minister's message



Hon Yvette D'Ath MP

Minister for Health and Ambulance Services

The Palaszczuk Government is proud to have developed Australia's first comprehensive sexual and reproductive health strategy in 2016.

Whilst this time-limited Strategy concludes in December 2021, we are pleased to announce that it will be replaced by the enduring Queensland Sexual Health Framework from January 2022 and will continue to be supported by the Sexual Health Ministerial Advisory Committee. I extend my sincere thanks to former and current members of the Committee for their advice and advocacy for better sexual health for all Queenslanders.

We have also continued our commitment to the delivery of better health outcomes for priority populations through translational research activities supported by the Sexual Health Research Fund.

This report for the period 2019–2021 updates not only the achievements and activities directly funded by the Strategy investment, but more importantly, showcases the breadth of work being undertaken across other government agencies and with our non-government partners. Much of this work is now embedded into agencies' core business, demonstrating that supporting people to achieve good sexual health is a shared responsibility.

The Palaszczuk Government is committed to achieving optimal public health outcomes for all Queenslanders, and I encourage everyone to make achieving good sexual health everybody's business.

# Sexual Health Ministerial Advisory Committee

The Sexual Health Ministerial Advisory Committee (Committee) was established in June 2017 to guide the implementation of the Queensland Sexual Health Strategy 2016–2021 and provide expert and timely advice on sexual and reproductive health matters to the Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services.

The Committee also provides advice on priorities and future challenges on sexual and reproductive health-related matters, including investment priorities under the Strategy and research activities; opportunities for clinicians, service providers and advocates to communicate and share information of strategic importance to the delivery of effective sexual and reproductive health services in Queensland; and provide input into state-wide, evidence-based sexual and reproductive health, sexually transmissible infections and blood-borne virus policies and other clinical guidelines where appropriate.

The Committee hosts an annual stakeholder engagement forum to provide a platform for intensive sector consultation on key issues. No forum was held in 2020 due to COVID-19 restrictions, however we will be pleased to be host an event in Townsville focussed on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sexual health in North Queensland as conditions allow.

## Committee membership

The current Sexual Health Ministerial Advisory Committee is comprised of ten members representing diverse areas of expertise, reflecting the broad scope of the Strategy:

- 1 Professor Cindy Shannon AM (Chair)**  
Expertise in health issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- 2 Dr Anthony Allworth**  
Expertise in infectious diseases.
- 3 Mr Phillip Carswell, OAM**  
Expertise in issues facing people who identify as LGBTIQ+.
- 4 Professor Rebecca Kimble**  
Expertise in reproductive and maternal health.
- 5 Dr Stephen Stathis**  
Expertise in gender dysphoria amongst children and young people.
- 6 Dr Graham Neilsen**  
Expertise in sexual health medicine.
- 7 Associate Professor Ignacio Correa-Velez**  
Expertise in multicultural health.
- 8 Ms Candi Forrest**  
Expertise in issues facing people who engage in sex work.
- 9 Mr Dallas Leon**  
Expertise in issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- 10 Ms Hayley Stevenson**  
Expertise in the provision of services to young people in the education sector.

# Strategic direction 1

## Improving community awareness, information and prevention across the lifespan

### Highlights include:

- Queensland Health's Stop the Rise of STIs campaign and associated website, launched in December 2019, provides access to a comprehensive collection of sexual health facts, FAQs, myth busters, resources, service locators and links for young Queenslanders <https://stoptherise.initiatives.qld.gov.au>.
- Queensland Police Service, through their LGBTI Liaison Program, work closely with LGBTI communities to develop partnerships, awareness and understanding of impacting issues to ensure equitable access to non-discriminatory and professional policing services.
- In 2019, Queensland Health released the *Caring for People Disclosing Sexual Assault Directive*, which aims to improve awareness and consistency in the acute care response and provides adults with the option to access forensic examination independently of a report to police.
- Queensland Police Service implemented a new online sexual assault reporting form in August 2020 to provide another avenue for victims of sexual assault to report to police.
- *Healthy ageing: A strategy for older Queenslanders* was released by Queensland Health in 2019 to inclusively recognise and support the diverse health needs of older Queenslanders.
- Hepatitis Queensland and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled health services have collaboratively developed the *B Stronger Project* to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community's health literacy relating to chronic hepatitis B. The project has three key messages: B tested, B vaccinated, B stronger.
- Children by Choice are a well-recognised service with established care pathways to sexual and reproductive healthcare providers such as Marie Stopes and True Relationships and Reproductive Health. These agencies aim to connect women with the right service at the right time to meet their immediate and ongoing sexual and reproductive healthcare needs across the lifespan.
- Communicable Diseases Branch responded to the need for increased awareness about syphilis by:
  - partnering with Clinical Excellence Queensland to roll out formal statewide implementation of the Queensland Syphilis in Pregnancy Guideline into public maternity departments.
  - funding the development and implementation of 'Let's Treat Syphilis', a health promotion campaign for syphilis prevention among gay, bisexual and men who have sex with men.
  - funding the development and implementation of training in sexual health assessments and contact tracing for antenatal services, focused on syphilis in pregnant patients.



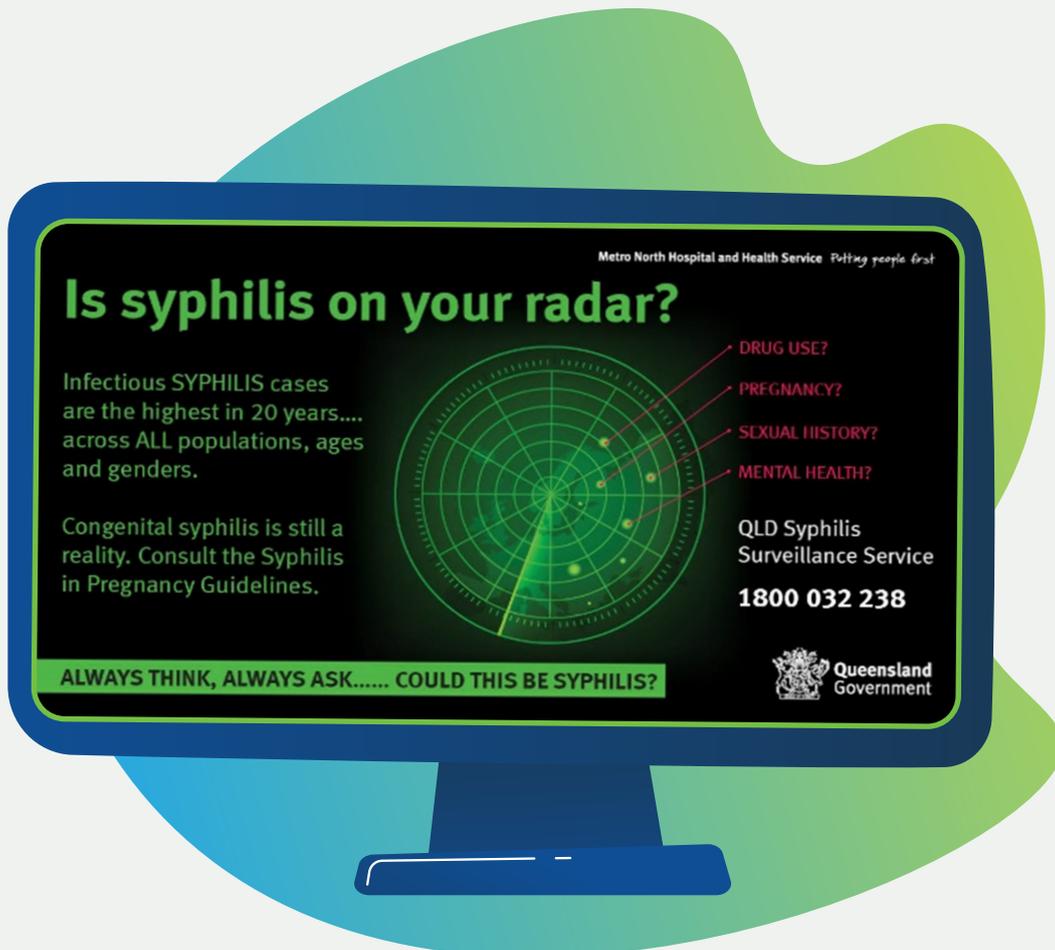
## Success story

### Queensland Syphilis Surveillance Service health promotion screensaver

Syphilis has re-emerged in many parts of the world and there has been a sustained increase in cases of infectious syphilis in Queensland over the last 20 years, with a further doubling of cases over the last 5 years. Congenital syphilis is the outcome of widespread transmission within the general population affecting women of reproductive age.

Many clinicians are unfamiliar with the changing epidemiology of syphilis, its varied clinical presentations, and the management of people at risk of or affected by syphilis.

This screensaver was developed by the Qld Syphilis Surveillance Service (South) to encourage screening and health promotion and prevention activities in all health service lines. It has been well received and made available for use in other Hospital and Health Services and clinical services, particularly those caring for vulnerable populations (for example, alcohol and other drugs services).



## Strategic direction 2

### Improving education and support for children and young people

#### Highlights include:

- Queensland Police Service (QPS) promotes and provides education on protective behaviours through School Based Police Officers and supporting the Daniel Morcombe Child Safety Curriculum program.
- The 2021 Australian Curriculum review includes proposed changes designed to strengthen the consent and respectful relationships content taught to students across Prep–year 10. The revised Australian Curriculum will be released in 2022 pending approval by state Education Ministers.
- The Department of Education is currently undertaking a review of Queensland’s P-12 Respectful relationships education program (RREP) with a view to strengthening content on consent and reporting of sexual assault. The release of the strengthened RREP is proposed for January 2022.
- The Department of Education’s Student Learning and Wellbeing Framework guides schools in the development of a whole school approach to supporting students’ wellbeing and highlights the importance of promoting available support services to students, including School Based Youth Health Nurses (SBYHNS).
- A “Guideline for Implementing Enhanced Sexual Health Services for Statewide School-Based Youth Health Nurses” was developed and published in 2019 to provide recommendations and best practice processes to support preventive health and wellbeing and health promotion services for secondary school-aged young people.
- School Based Youth Health Nurses promote educational opportunities appropriate to the needs of the school community to build knowledge of normal sexual behaviour, appropriate responses to address problem sexual behaviour and to support children who disclose sexual abuse, and have access to online learning to support the provision of sexual health education to students with special needs.
- The Queensland Children’s Gender Service has experienced continued year-on-year growth in demand since it opened in 2017, including a 95 per cent increase in new referrals and provided 3573 occasions of service and saw 310 new patients in 2020–21. A Sexual Health Physician has been appointed to provide statewide consultation liaison to general practitioners (GPs) to facilitate earlier discharge, shared care in rural and regional locations and build statewide primary care capacity.



## Success story

### Relationship Ready

As a direct outcome from the Committee's 2018 Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health Forum, Queensland Health partnered with Education Queensland to commission a program to enhance positive health messaging to young Queenslanders, supporting them to be healthy, safe and confident about their bodies and their relationships, and increasing their capacity to make mature, respectful decisions as they transition into adulthood.

Relationship Ready, designed and delivered by True Relationships and Reproductive Health (formerly Family Planning Queensland), aims to improve the quality and quantity of relationships and sexuality education that children and young people receive by enhancing the capability and confidence of those who teach them.

Using a strategic, multi-demographic approach, school-based educators, parents and carers, and senior secondary students receive curriculum-aligned expert professional development and education through multi-modal delivery options.

<https://true.arlo.co/w/courses/67-relationship-ready>

<https://true.arlo.co/w/courses/81-relationship-ready-training-for-teachers-and-school-staff>

<https://true.arlo.co/w/courses/73-relationship-ready-parent-carer-pack>

“

*I wish more teachers knew about this course and did it. Should be compulsory PD regardless of age of students you teach or subject areas you teach. Great PD, I learnt so much and will now put this into practice*

”

**Relationship Ready**

Increasing confidence & capability  
in Relationships & Sexuality Education

## Strategic direction 3

### Responding to the needs of specific population groups



#### Highlights include:

- Queensland Health partnered with Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council to develop *Making Tracks: towards health equity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples—working together to achieve life expectancy parity by 2031* (Making Tracks). Making Tracks is a milestone discussion paper that represents the shared conversation that needs to happen with affected populations to ensure that the broader determinants of health are considered and integrated into holistic and effective system responses.
- Communicable Diseases Branch has funded Queensland Positive People to deliver a state-wide online HIV self-testing program, with a particular focus on people in regional and remote areas, for four years until 2025.
- It is estimated that there are approximately 5000 people living with diagnosed HIV in Queensland. Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) data reported that 4777 Queenslanders were on antiretroviral therapy (ART) during the period July 2019–June 2020, representing 95 per cent uptake of ART among those living with diagnosed HIV.
- Since the listing of HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) from April 2018, there has been an increase in uptake of HIV PrEP among Queenslanders. There were 5299 people who received HIV PrEP during the period July 2019–June 2020.
- Nurse Practitioners around Australia are now eligible to prescribe s100 medicines for the treatment of HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C, enabling them to start integrating the prescribing of hepatitis C anti-viral therapy, HIV PrEP, HIV post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), and hepatitis B s100 medicines into their routine patient care.
- Queensland Police Service appointed a Sex Work Police Liaison Officer as a key contact with industry bodies to improve system responses for sex workers who report being victims of crime.
- The Department of Justice and Attorney-General fund WWILD, a non-government support organisation for adults and adolescents living with intellectual or learning disabilities, to deliver a sexual violence support service to this target population group. WWILD has developed a range of easy to read educational resources for people with intellectual or learning disabilities and their family members and carers about a range of topics relating to violence and safety. Increased understanding about the range of behaviours that might constitute violence in a relationship, what sexual violence is and how it might make them feel, and what to do and who to talk to about safety will likely result in greater help seeking behaviours.
- Queensland Health established the Office for Prisoner Health and Wellbeing in response to the Offender Health Services review. The joint *Reducing barriers to health and wellbeing: The Queensland Prisoner Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2020–2025* was released by Queensland Health and Queensland Corrective Services in 2020 to respond to challenges and opportunities in prison health service delivery, including communicable diseases.
- Queensland is participating in a range of research projects to help improve the delivery of sexual health services to people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland is a key enabler between researchers and the communities. Projects underway include an HIV PrEP research project led by the University of Southern Queensland (USQ), CALD Sexual Health Literacy research projects led by UQ and QUT, a hepatitis B GP capability project led by USQ, a hepatitis B stigma project in Chinese and Vietnamese communities led by the University of NSW and the Migrant Blood Borne Viruses & Sexual Health Survey (MiBSS), led by Curtin University.

# Success story

## Lady Peeps health promotion campaign

True Relationships and Reproductive Health were commissioned to develop and implement a suite of syphilis prevention strategies for women of reproductive age in Queensland between July 2019 and September 2020.

A video clip featuring the character 'Lady Peeps' was launched in July 2020, encouraging women to be proactive about their sexual health and to ask for a syphilis test. The clip is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZkG6MeHKHEw>

True developed other targeted strategies and messaging for vulnerable women at higher risk of syphilis and other STIs, particularly those with chaotic lifestyles such as being homeless, a history of incarceration, an incarcerated partner, or a history of problematic drug or alcohol use.

The strategies were developed in partnership with women from the target populations and the services that support them such as Sisters Inside, the Queensland Syphilis Surveillance Service, Clarence Street Youth Service, Queensland Injectors Health Network, and the Institute for Urban Indigenous Health.



# Strategic direction 4

## Improving the service system



### Highlights include:

- The Department of Health, through Communicable Diseases Branch, committed \$1.42 million over four rounds to the Sexual Health Research Fund (SHRF) to provide seed funding for translational research. Grants of up to \$100,000 (including GST) have been made available for research that will improve the delivery of sexual health services and support implementation of the Strategy. Future rounds of the fund are planned from 2022.
- Queensland Police Service (QPS) commenced a program of work to enhance their response to victims of sexual violence and strengthen a victim-centric focus, which includes establishing a pilot of dedicated sexual violence liaison officers in the Townsville and Logan QPS districts, establishing a new sexual violence prevention working group and partnering with University of Queensland to develop a statewide, sustainable, victim-centric and trauma-informed training program.
- In 2020, nearly 70 per cent of the notifications for newly acquired hepatitis C in Queensland came from correctional settings. A successful partnership has developed to deliver a range of complementary education, testing and treatment services for people in correctional centres, those newly released and those reporting to community corrections. Partners include Queensland Health, Queensland Corrective Services, primary care providers and non-government organisations including Hepatitis Queensland, the Queensland Injectors Health Network (QIHN) and *The Kombi Clinic*, an innovative and free hepatitis C community outreach clinic.
- Nurse Practitioner capability strengthens the clinical model of care within remote locations and ensures people are able to receive the care they need from local clinicians close to the community they live, reducing fragmentation and barriers to care and improves patient outcomes and experiences.
- Prevent. Support. Believe. Queensland's Framework to Prevent Sexual Violence includes as a key principle that "Systems and services should be accessible, integrated, trauma informed and culturally responsive". A strategy in the framework is "providing timely, integrated and victim-centric support for people who have experienced sexual violence." Actions to address these principles and strategies will be progressed as part of the Sexual Violence Prevention Action Plan, due late 2021.
- The Townsville Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) supports the coordinated service response to all victims of sexual abuse and sexual assault. The SART was provided with \$1.8 million funding over five years in 2020 which enables the local sexual assault support service to provide 24/7 coordination and support for victims of sexual assault in coordination with Queensland Police Service and the Townsville Hospital and Health Service.
- Communicable Diseases Branch has continued funding arrangements for three 0.5 full time equivalent (FTE) Public Health Nurse (Contact Tracing Support Officer) positions in Townsville, Cairns and Mt Isa, and has provided additional funding to establish one 0.5 FTE Public Health Nurse (Contract Tracing Support Officer) in Rockhampton. The funding arrangements are designed to increase stability for this workforce and increase STI contact tracing support and capacity for the state, particularly in rural regional and remote areas.
- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander STI drug replacement program was reviewed by Communicable Diseases Branch in 2020, with the updated model in place for the current round of medication dispatch. There are currently 38 services participating in the program, and between 1 January 2019 and 31 December 2020 the program provided for free and immediate single dose treatments for 2223 chlamydia, 984 gonorrhoea, and 1205 trichomoniasis infections within the target population.
- There are now nine general practices, three community organisations and eleven sexual health clinics offering HIV point-of-care testing (POCT), enabled through the Queensland Health HIV POCT Program.
- A permanent North Queensland HIV Public Health Team, consisting of two nursing positions, has been established to assist with contact tracing and management of complex clients living with HIV, augmenting the existing Brisbane-based HIV Public Health Team in Communicable Diseases Branch.

# Success story

## Statewide sexual health clinical network

In partnership with the Communicable Diseases Branch, the Healthcare Improvement Unit of Clinical Excellence Queensland established the Statewide Sexual Health Clinical Network (SHCN) in 2019.

The purpose of the SHCN is to function as a specialist platform to share and provide expertise, advice and recommendations to Hospital and Health Services and the Department of Health to support high quality, evidence based, safe, effective and patient focused, equitable public sexual health services.

The network enables clinicians to connect with fellow clinicians across Queensland to share ideas and models of care, and to work together to create solutions for shared challenges.

The SHCN Steering Committee is multidisciplinary and includes representation from urban, regional and remote services, Indigenous health workers, general practice, the research sector, and the non-government sector. Since inception the SHCN has undertaken a state-wide service mapping exercise that includes collecting information about models of care and access to services, which will be utilised to support future service planning.

