

# Communiqué

## August 2023

### Preamble

#### Sexual Health Ministerial Advisory Committee

The Sexual Health Ministerial Advisory Committee (Committee) was established in 2017 by former Minister for Health and Ambulance Services, Hon Cameron Dick MP, following the release of the whole of government *Queensland Sexual Health Strategy 2016–2021*. In 2022, the Strategy was replaced by the *Queensland Sexual Health Framework* (Framework), supported by a series of Action Plans for Blood Borne Viruses and Sexually Transmissible Infections (BBV/STI).

The Committee aims to facilitate a strategic approach around sexual and reproductive health between government agencies, the non-government sector, researchers, and service providers. 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 appointed for its third term, until March 2025, under the current Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services and Minister for Women, the Hon Shannon Fentiman MP.

#### Sexual Health Research Fund and Research Sub-Committee

The Research Sub-Committee (Sub-Committee) is a group of Committee members who oversee the strategic direction of the Sexual Health Research Fund (SHRF). The SHRF was established to provide seed funding for translational research activities to improve the delivery of sexual health services in Queensland and to support implementation of the Framework. The Sub-Committee set research priorities and assess and approve SHRF applications.

The Committee is scheduled to meet quarterly, and communiqués are generated to provide an overview of major items discussed at each meeting. This Communiqué provides an overview of the Committee meeting held on 31 August 2023 and includes an update on the SHRF.

### Committee meeting overview

The August Committee meeting included a series of briefings highlighting the need for and benefit of local, accessible cross-sector healthcare in supporting optimal sexual and reproductive health and wellbeing.

#### GPs in Schools Pilot

The Department of Education presented on their *GPs in Schools Pilot* (Pilot), part of the Student Wellbeing Package delivered as a 2020 election commitment. The Pilot has received overwhelmingly positive support and commitment from participating schools and GPs, as well as from students, with



thousands of appointments accessed. Challenges in recruiting and retaining GPs were discussed as reflecting broader GP / healthcare workforce pressures and emphasising the need for sustained support of primary care and specialist workforces. The Committee commended the Pilot and expressed their support and desire for its continuation and expansion. More information can be found through the Department of Education at [Student Wellbeing Package](#).

### **Draft Syphilis Action Plan**

The Department of Health's Communicable Diseases Branch is considering consultation feedback on a draft *Syphilis Action Plan*, aiming to support cross-sector coordination of infectious syphilis responses across Queensland. Broad consultation sought wide-ranging perspectives including executive leadership from Queensland Health and other Queensland Government agencies, sexual health and public health services, maternal healthcare, primary care, First Nations Queenslanders, rural and remote communities, child and youth, researchers, and several non-government partner organisations. The Committee noted the high level of interest in the draft plan, demonstrated by significant volumes of feedback received.

### **Youth Gender Healthcare**

The Committee received a briefing on factors contributing to generally increasing demand for youth gender healthcare across Australia. Current evidence suggests a range of socio-political factors are encouraging people to disclose their transgender identity earlier, including reducing stigma towards and greater awareness and increasing acceptance of gender diversity. The early identification and management of mental health issues for young transgendered people was highlighted as critical to support individual and family wellbeing. Access to local mental health supports may also reduce gender service referrals, as not all gender diverse people want or need medication as part of their gender care.

The Queensland Children's Gender Service (QCGS) have commissioned an external independent review of their model of care as part of their ongoing commitment to providing safe, effective, and evidence-based care. The review's outcomes will help to inform QCGS's future vision of a networked model of gender care across Queensland, improving access to local services closer to families. Improved capacity and capability within local Queensland Health and primary care services would support integration of gender care within existing health settings. The Committee expressed their support of the independent review of QCGS' model of care and welcomed the future evaluation report. The Committee expressed their support for the proposed networked model of gender care across Queensland.

### **2023 Forum Report – Syphilis: everybody's business**

The Committee have published the report from their 2023 Forum *Syphilis: everybody's business*, available at [Queensland Sexual Health Framework](#). Acknowledging many Forum delegates were invited to provide feedback on the draft *Syphilis Action Plan*, the Committee intend to reconvene delegates in 2024 to share achievements and highlights following the release of the finalised *Syphilis Action Plan*. It was originally planned to reconvene delegates six months after the May 2023 Forum.

The next Committee meeting is scheduled for November 2023.

## Research Sub-Committee update

At their August meeting, the Committee endorsed the Sub-Committee's recommendation to resume Round 5 of the SHRF, following a postponement to complete strategic planning in support of future SHRF rounds. The Sub-Committee emphasised their desire to see a diversity of researchers and an expanded focus of research in future SHRF rounds, reflecting the broad range of priorities articulated in the Framework. Information on Round 5, including research priorities and timeframes, will be released towards the end of 2023.

More information on the SHRF, including a list of funded projects, 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](mailto:SH_Framework@health.qld.gov.au).