MSHC
MELBOURNE SEXUAL HEALTH CENTRE
Part of AlfredHealth

Melbourne Sexual Health Centre

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

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ABOUT MELBOURNE SEXUAL HEALTH CENTRE

Melbourne Sexual Health Centre (MSHC) is a service within Alfred Health. The vision of the MSHC is to be a leader in the management and prevention of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and its mission is to maximize sexual health through innovation and excellence in public health, education, clinical care and research.

It is the only centre that provides full-time, free sexual health services to the people of Victoria. The services provided by MSHC include general clinics for the management of STIs and HIV and a variety of specialist clinics. The service provided is predominantly walk in led by nurse triage service that focuses on high-risk individuals.

About this report

This annual report outlines the operational performance for MSHC from 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023. We value transparency and accountability and aim to have all our reportable data available to the community in this publication.

LGBTIQA+ Category, City of Melbourne (Team Award: Melbourne Sexual Health Centre)

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE 2023

I will retire as Director at the end of 2024 and so this will be my last (and 23rd!) annual report. Thank you for the extraordinary privilege of having had the opportunity to work with so many talented people over the years, as we have turned our service into one of the world's best. Melbourne Sexual Health Centre is now a highly efficient and effective service that is admired around the world. We have incrementally implemented research findings that have seen a fourfold rise in the number of clients seen each year in both the general and HIV clinics and the people we see have much higher rates of infections- meaning that each person we treat lessens the burden of STI transmission substantially. We should be proud of our achievements that have materially improved services to the people of Victoria.

This year our service has seen a return to the demand of the pre-covid period and outstrip our ability to meet this demand. This is a dangerous situation for Victoria because STI services are the most powerful STI control strategy that governments have and STI rates are continuing to rise. The most worrying rise is syphilis cases in women because rises in women are tragically followed by rises in congenital syphilis. Indeed, this is exactly what is happening. In the 20 years before 2017 there was a single case of congenital syphilis in Victoria. Since 2017 there have been 18 cases of congenital syphilis and likely significantly more given this condition is under recognised.

To address these issues, we have made significant changes in 2023 to improve how we deliver services. The first major change has been to implement a new registration process called the 'Digital Front Door' that has freed up significant nursing and administration time that can now be directed to front line clinical services. The Digital Front Door 'triages' clients on the web page into those requiring appointments and those with urgent needs who are asked to attend our walk-in service. The web page also actively directs clients to other services if our appointment bookings are full. The Digital Front Door also allows individuals to register on-line and fill out our computerised questionnaire on their mobile devices replacing the need for old 'end of life' touch screens. This work has been led by Rashidur Rahman with the help of many other individuals at our service and Alfred Health.

The second project that we have been working on with Professor Hocking's group from the University of Melbourne is called TESTIT. This is supported by an NHMRC partnership grant and is developing a web-based testing option for asymptomatic individuals who want STI testing. Currently individuals who want asymptomatic screening need to attend a physical health service. If they choose to come to our service, it is currently very challenging to obtain appointments. Much of the design work has now been completed and it will be launched in 2024.

In 2023 MSHC provided 54,276 consultations to 38,239 individuals. While this is below our peak in 2019 of 57,110 consultations it clearly highlights how demand has returned to the pre-covid period. The nature of the clients we see has become more complex than in 2019 because after the record year of 2019 we made significant changes to restrict asymptomatic screening so more complex symptomatic clients were prioritised. The rationale for this is twofold- individuals with symptoms will derive a great individual health benefit than those without symptoms, but also symptomatic individuals have a greater risk of STIs, so the population benefit is also greater. The net effect of this is that the clients we're currently seeing each take more time to see than that those in 2019 and hence our current workload is higher than it has ever been before.

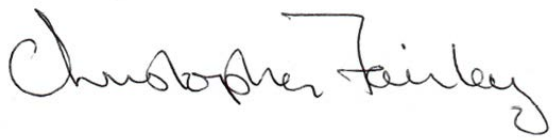
Along this same theme of striving to provide accessible STI services to Victorians, we are grateful for the work Lisa Kennedy and others have created a network of general practitioner partner clinics. This program, funded by the Department aims to provide the Victorian public with more options for assessing sexual health services and thereby contributing to downward pressure on STI rates. In 2023 four new GP partners clinics were added bringing the total number of clinics to 9 some of which now provide telehealth services.

Research has continued to be one of the strengths of our service and has underpinned much of the strategic direction of our clinical services as we strive to provide the most efficient and effective services into the future. We have active research NHMRC programs in virtually every area of STIs including bacterial vaginosis and mycoplasma led by Professor Catriona Bradshaw, gonorrhoea and HPV and gonorrhoea led by Professor Eric Chow, HIV prevention led by Professor Jason Ong, mathematical modelling and AI led by Professor Lei Zhang and syphilis led by Professor Marcus Chen. Each of these programs is supported by highly competitive NHMRC grants and is of outstanding quality.

We continue to contribute significantly to our community and profession. Perhaps the highlight of 2023 was the awarding of the City of Melbourne Award, 2023 LGBTIQA+ Award. STIGMA matters more than anything almost. Our staff have received many awards and prizes in 2023 including NHMRC, and other grants PhD awards that are too numerous to individually mention.

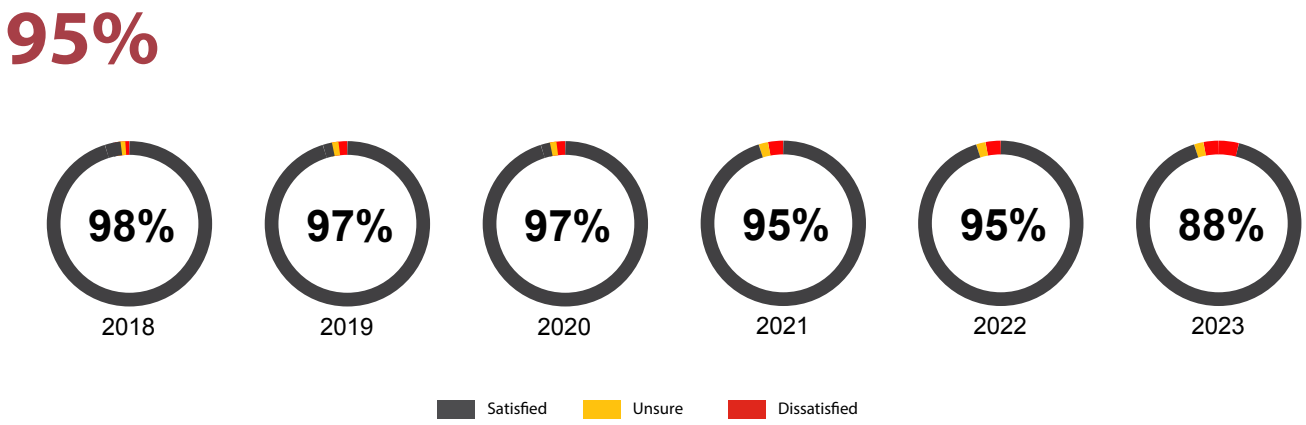
Bringing us all together are our outstanding Wellbeing team. They have contributed significantly to the warm and friendly environment MSHC. Some highlights include adding pronouns and an LGBTQ+ flag to our name badges and our large wall-based map highlighting all our diverse origins from around the world.

As I leave as Director, I have an overwhelming sense of gratitude to the amazing people with whom I have had the privilege to work with over what is nearly a quarter of a century. Our Centre is made up of the most impressive, selfless, committed and above all caring people who have a profound sense of 'duty and service' to their community. Thank you for the bottom of my heart.



Client survey overall satisfaction

Melbourne Sexual Health Centre scored an 88% overall satisfaction rating in 2023 which is significantly lower than the 95% or higher level in previous years (Figure 2). We do not know why the level was lower than usual other than during the time of the survey the Center was changing the client registration computer system. In early 2024, the same question was repeated as part of a separate evaluation, and the Centre scored a 96% satisfaction rate. We assume that the 88% result may be related to specific issues about the introduction of the computer system at the time of that survey and may not reflect the feeling of clients over the entire year.



VICTORIAN SEXUAL HEALTH NETWORK (VSHN) 2023 REPORT

In 2023 the VSHN added four new GP partners: Andrew Place Clinic (Bundoora and Mill Park), Anglesea Medical on the surf coast, Grandview Family Clinic (Cowes) and Modern Medical (Caroline Springs) taking the total number of affiliated Sexual Health in Practice (SHIP) clinics to 9. The Department of Health has also earmarked the Western Metropolitan region for an additional GP practice in the current funding cycle.

Due to the importance of data collection, it is now a requirement of the VSHN partnership that clinics have ACCESS (Australian Collaboration for Coordinated Enhanced Sentinel Surveillance) software installed so that they act as sentinel sites for monitoring of STIs. Our relationship with the Burnet Institute has been important in providing biannual data that allows us to assess the effectiveness of SHIP clinics in terms of meeting KPIs. To this end, we are pleased to state that all the established clinics were provided with incentive payments for the 2023 - 2024 financial year.

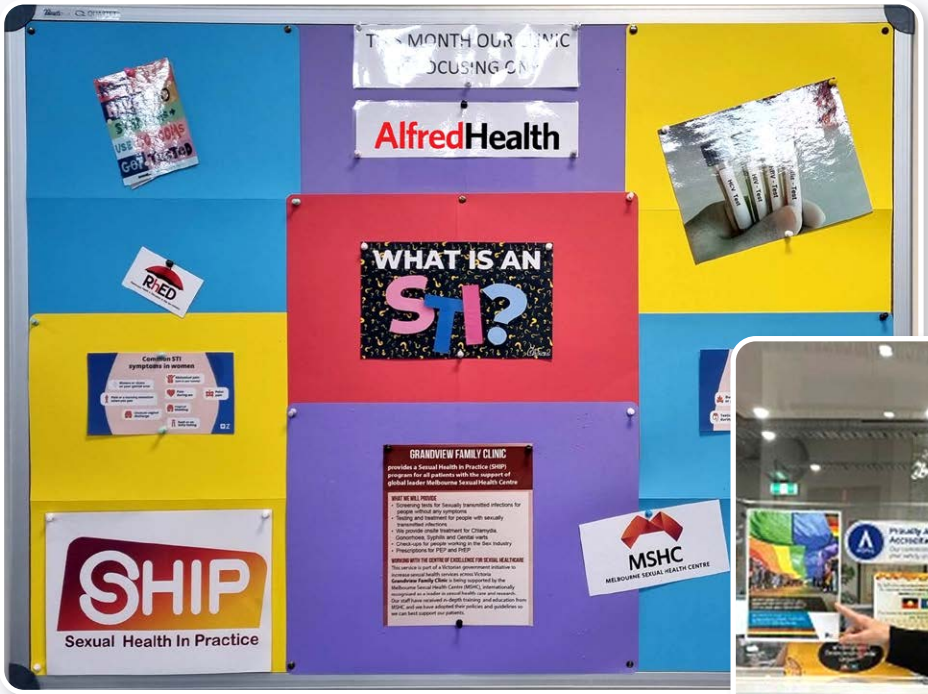
Another noteworthy event in 2023 was the rapid response from Kardinia Health and Cranbourne West Medical Centre in providing telehealth consultations for MSHC clients that were being turned away due to the high volume of attendees during the summer months. This, and other initiatives such as the response to the Mpox outbreak highlights the importance work of the VSHN to support the smooth running of MSHC.

In summary, we are looking forward to welcoming a new clinic in 2024 and maintaining the current VSHN network. We would like to thank our GP partners and stakeholders, particularly the primary healthcare networks, for their unflagging support since 2020. Please review Stay STI Free for further information.

Achievements for 2023

- VSHN now has 9 GP partners spanning over 10 different sites
- VSHN has played a large role in fostering the links between Local Public Health Units (LPHU) and GP partners
- Key stakeholders have supported the VSHN, building stronger relationships between key organisations
- Primary Health Networks have actively supported the recruitment and promotion of new services
- Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were introduced to drive high-quality and comprehensive care
- 9 GP partners have enrolled in ACCESS Analytics (Australian Collaboration for Coordinated Enhanced Sentinel Surveillance)
- 35 GPs attended Dr Mel Bissessor's training during the recruitment of 4 new practices
- 24 Nurses and 15 reception staff attended Chantal Maloney's training during the recruitment of 4 new practices – all done onsite at the GP practices
- Travel allowance is offered to GP partners when attending MSHC clinical placements

VSHN 2023 gallery



IT INNOVATIONS 2023

MSHC's Infrastructure modernisation project contributes a positive impact in the short and long term, including improved efficiency, enhanced security, better patient experience, cost savings, innovation, and scalability. Some of the key innovations from MSHC modernisation include:

IT Team Achievements:

1. Successful Deployment of Digital Front Door (DFD):
   - √ Implemented DFD, an online patient appointment and self-interview service, replacing the outdated CASI kiosk application.
   - √ Enhanced patient experience and streamlined administrative workflows.
   - √ Achieved improved functionality, reduced maintenance costs, and enhanced data analytics capabilities.
2. Establishment of Cybersecurity Partnership with Alfred Digital Health
   - √ Established a robust partnership with Alfred Digital Health to prioritize cybersecurity measures.
   - √ Ensured compliance with AH & DHHS 72 controls to mitigate security risks.
   - √ Aligned cybersecurity initiatives with Alfred Health's strategic roadmap.
3. Integration of AI for Enhanced STI Detection:
   - √ Integrated an AI-powered system for STI detection, enabling secure image uploads from patients' smart devices.
   - √ Implemented advanced AI algorithms for accurate detection and prediction of STI infections.
   - √ Improved patient care and contributed to promoting sexual well-being.
4. Optimization of Follow-up Module:
   - √ Optimized the follow-up maintenance module, reducing loading time from 10 minutes to less than a minute.
   - √ Improved efficiency for follow-up nurses on CPMS, leading to enhanced productivity.
5. Implementation of Paperless Faxing Service (RightFax):
   - √ Implemented RightFax for paperless faxing, allowing direct transmission from computers.
   - √ Ensured secure and efficient fax communication while eliminating paper-based processes.
6. Development of Clinical Service Dashboard:
   - √ Developed a comprehensive clinical report dashboard, providing insights into key performance indicators.
   - √ Empowered management and clinicians with actionable data for informed decision-making.
7. Migration to PowerBI Reporting Platform:
   - √ Successfully migrated reports to the PowerBI reporting platform, enhancing reporting capabilities.
   - √ Enabled real-time data extraction and visualization of clinic processes for improved decision support.
8. Integration of Paperless NPEP System:
   - √ Integrated the NPEP system with CPMS DB through a data warehouse, reducing manual data entry.
   - √ Streamlined NPEP data capture processes for improved accuracy and efficiency.
9. Office 365 Migration:
   - √ Completed the migration of all MSHC computers to Office 365, facilitating cloud-based collaboration.
   - √ Improved accessibility and scalability of software applications while ensuring up-to-date software versions.

10. Implementation of Backup Network Link:
    - √ Established a backup network link to ensure uninterrupted clinic services during network failures.
    - √ Enhanced business continuity and minimized disruptions to patient care.
11. Upgrade of Remote Server Infrastructure:
    - √ Upgraded remote server infrastructure with the latest operating system and increased memory capacity.
    - √ Equipped servers with Office 365 integration to support remote work and improve productivity.
12. Implementation of Liquid Files for Secure File Sharing:
    - √ Introduced Liquid Files for secure file-sharing with external users, enhancing data protection measures.
    - √ Facilitated efficient and secure document exchange while complying with regulatory requirements.

MSHC WELLBEING

Through 2023 the MSHC Wellbeing team has continued to flourish and build on the systems in place to bring the team together. Informative sessions during lunchtimes and social gatherings after work have been integral to this.

The emphasis has encapsulated the Australian values of freedom, respect, fairness and equality of opportunity, which are underpinned by the core Alfred health beliefs of working together to compassionately make a difference for the future. The valuable contributions from Claire Randall, Linda Liu, Mark Thompson, Beth Costello, Kate Pottapel, Megan Smith, Tina Schmidt, Roisin Dineen, Shari Boyanton, Bec Wigan, Liz Griffiths, Mark Chung, Marleen Tschaepe, Monica Owlad, Finn Mercury, Lauren Bryar, Nikhil Arram, David Nguyen, Stacey Suddabey, Mariia Calleja, Marcus Massiano, Isabel Fabian and Jason Kenna developed changes to our workplace for example adding pronouns and an LGBTQ+ flag to our name badges whilst also created many events.

The work has included an ongoing project of a large wall based map showcasing that as a team we come from across the globe. In addition, we have been celebrating the different cultures through (food-based sharing) celebrations and weekly recipe sharing in our local newsletter. There was also a paint and sip event, a Lunar New year, Christmas and pet celebrations. Ride to Workday, lunchtime guided breathing sessions, Wear it purple day and Pride celebrations and fitness sessions after work and regularly celebrating the many birthdays.

As the Wellbeing team plans for another year of events bringing the team together through shared experiences, respect and education of our differences being what unites us and help us flourish as a team.

RESEARCH

Research has continued to be one of the strengths of our service and has underpinned much of the strategic direction of our clinical services. We have active research NHMRC programs in virtually every area of STIs including:

- Bacterial vaginosis and Mycoplasma led by Professor Catriona Bradshaw
  - We have completed the first successful male partner treatment trial to improve BV cure for women. The trial was prematurely ceased by the Data Safety Monitoring Board for superiority. This trial represents a major paradigm shift in knowledge and clinical practice as it demonstrates that reinfection from sexual partners drives BV recurrence. Male partner treatment will become routine clinical practice in 2024 and the team is preparing the necessary clinical documents for implementation. The trial will be presented at the STI and HIV World Congress in September 2024.
- HIV prevention led by Professor Jason Ong - The HIV/STI Economics and Health Preference group has had a productive 2023 with 51 publications in total. The main highlights include:
  - Our work with WHO to create a vaccine value profile for gonorrhoea (i.e. investment case for gonorrhoae vaccination)
  - Determining the preferences of HIV prevention strategies for Asian-born men who have sex with men living in Australia
  - Evaluating the outputs of our Nudgeathon event for creating PrEP campaigns using behavioural economic principles with funding from Alfred Health, a working group at MSHC conducted a Nudgeathon event.
  - Solutions that emerged related to three opportunities to Nudge: 1) before arriving at MSHC; 2) before they come up the stairs to the waiting area; and 3) whilst in the waiting area. Nudges were created to alter the current landing page of the MSHC website, including implementing a new tool to help direct people to the best services and the creation of a live tracker that provides information to clients about the current waiting time at MSHC. We plan to implement nudges incrementally in the coming months whilst carefully evaluating its impact on client numbers, and client and staff satisfaction.
- Syphilis led by Professor Marcus Chen - Multiple projects focused on improving syphilis testing and control are continuing with some of the following highlights:
  - Completion of multiplex testing for syphilis and herpes in general practice. This has resulted in a 25% increase in detection of PCR confirmed primary syphilis in Victorian general practice.
  - Evaluation of the rollout in universal late pregnancy screening for syphilis to prevent congenital syphilis.
  - Development of novel syphilis diagnostics, including a viability test for Treponema pallidum and a point of care test to detect Treponema pallidum directly from clinical lesions.
- Gonorrhoea and HPV and gonorrhoea led by Professor Eric Chow
- Mathematical modelling and AI led by Professor Lei Zhang.

AWARDS/PRIZES

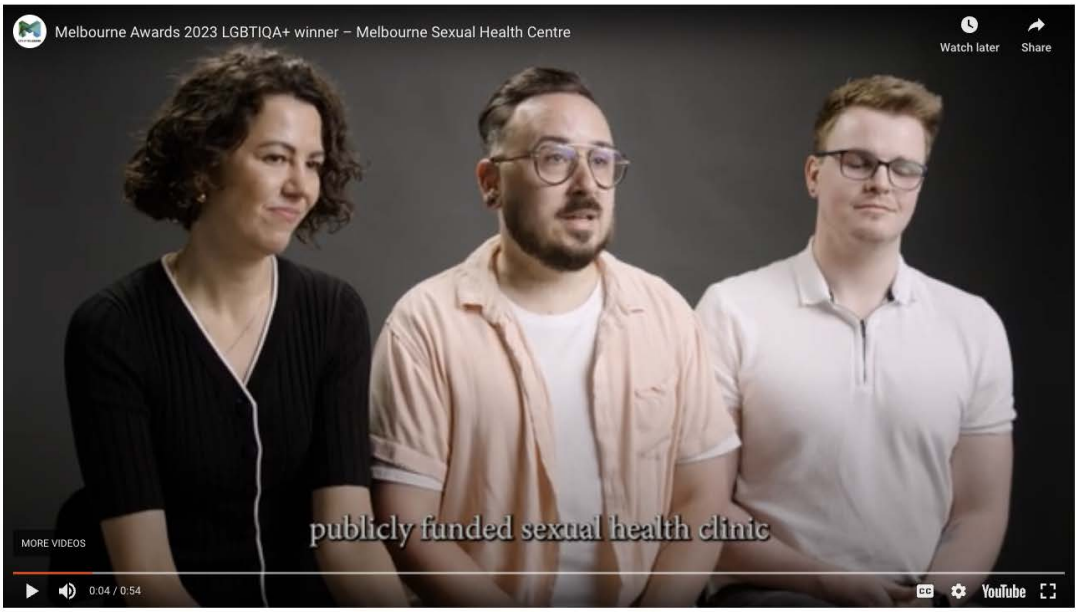
- CAPHIA Research Excellence, Council of Academic Public Heath Institutions Australasia (Team Award: Eric Chow [Lead], Christopher Fairley, Catriona Bradshaw, Marcus Chen and Jason Ong)
- The Frank Fenner Award for Advanced Research in Infectious Diseases, The Australasian Society For Infectious Diseases (ASID): Eric Chow
- Melbourne Awards: LGBTIQA+ Category, City of Melbourne (Team Award: Melbourne Sexual Health Centre)
- Australasian Sexual and Reproductive Health Alliance (ASRHA) Young Leader Award: Erica Plummer
- New appointments: President of the Sexual Health Society of Victoria; Co-Chair of the Equity Diversity and Inclusion Committee, Monash Central Clinical School: Lenka Vodstrcil
- Fellow of the Australian Academy of Health and Medical Sciences: Catriona Bradshaw
- AChSHM Award for Best Postgraduate Thesis in Sexual Health Medicine 2023: Janet Towns

2023 LGBTIQA+ Award

Improving people's sexual health with professional, non-judgemental care.

The Melbourne Sexual Health Centre is a public clinic delivering world-class clinical services such as sexual health and STI testing, diagnosis and treatment services. Located in Melbourne but serving across Victoria, the team provide professional and non-judgmental clinical care to ensure that the LGBTIQA+ community always feel welcomed and supported.

Engaging with the government, industry and community, the MSHC responds to emerging issues that affect the LGBTIQA+ community to find solutions to improve people's sexual health, well-being and quality of life.



SERVICES AND CONSULTATIONS

The numbers of consultations by type of service provided onsite are shown in Table 3. A further 122 out-reach consultations were carried out offsite at Access Health services for marginalized people and test kits sent to clients if requested (TestMe and vending machines).

Table 1

Clinic Type	Total	Male	Female	Other gender
General Clinic	47,576	32,497	14,114	965
HIV Clinic	6,314	5,501	738	75
Counselling	386	241	137	8
Total	54,276	38,239	14,989	1,048
Individuals	27,156	17,693	8,992	471

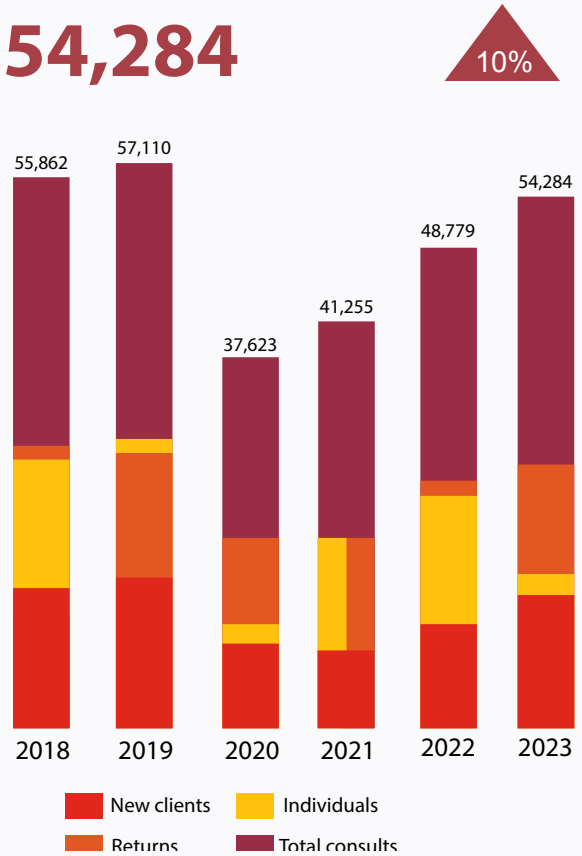
Diagnoses

The numbers of the most frequently made diagnoses in consultations are shown in Table 2.
Gonococcal and chlamydial infections included are individuals with a newly diagnosed infection and may have more than one site of infection. Those returning with a new infection following successful treatment are included as a new diagnosis.

Diagnoses	Total
Chlamydia trachomatis	4,065
Neisseria gonorrhoeae	2,753
Non gonococcal urethritis (NGU)	2,501
Herpes	1,243
Infectious syphilis	383
Bacterial vaginosis	1,624
Warts	1,018
HIV new cases	54
PID	319
Monkeypox virus	5
Mycoplasma genitalium	746
Lymphogranuloma venereum	49
HIV PEP	970
PCI	30
Gonorrhoea in women	262
Trichomoniasis in women	67
Infectious syphilis in women	15

In 2023, the number of consultations are slowly returning to numbers prior to covid 19. In contrast 2021, there was a marked reduction in consultations as a result of extended lock-downs in Victoria. Prior to 2020, the numbers of consultations continued to rise with the number of individuals steadily increasing (Figure 1).

Figure 1 **Increasing numbers of clients each year until COVID-19 in 2020/1 and increasing in 2023**



Prior to 2020, the numbers of positive chlamydia and gonorrhoea tests also increased (Figure 2 and 3).

Figure 2 Number of positive chlamydia tests by year

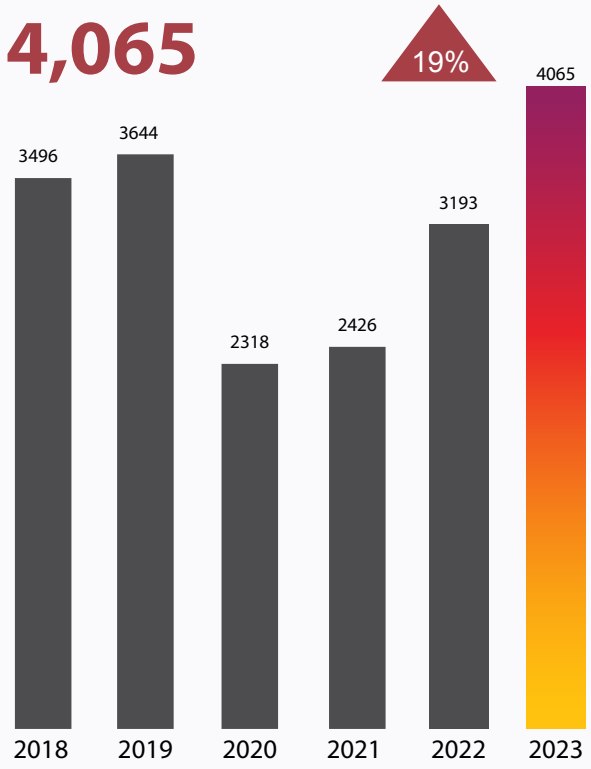


Figure 3 Number of positive gonorrhoea tests by year

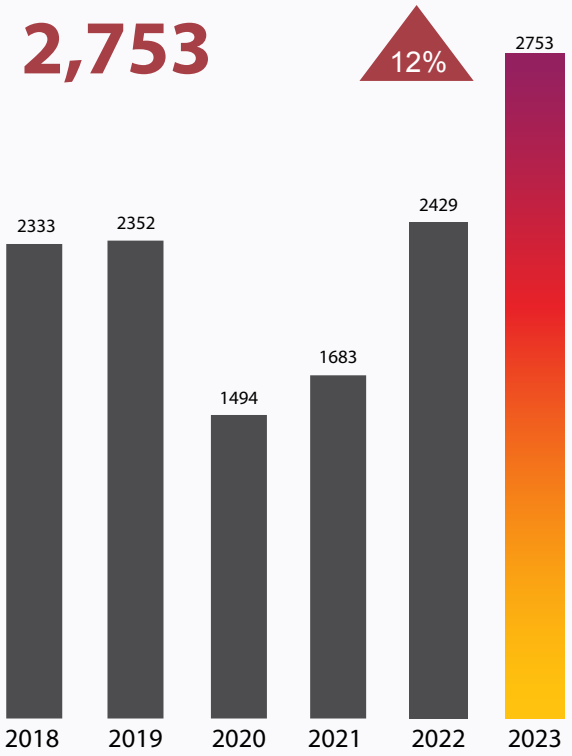


Figure 4 **Number of infectious syphilis cases by quarter and year**

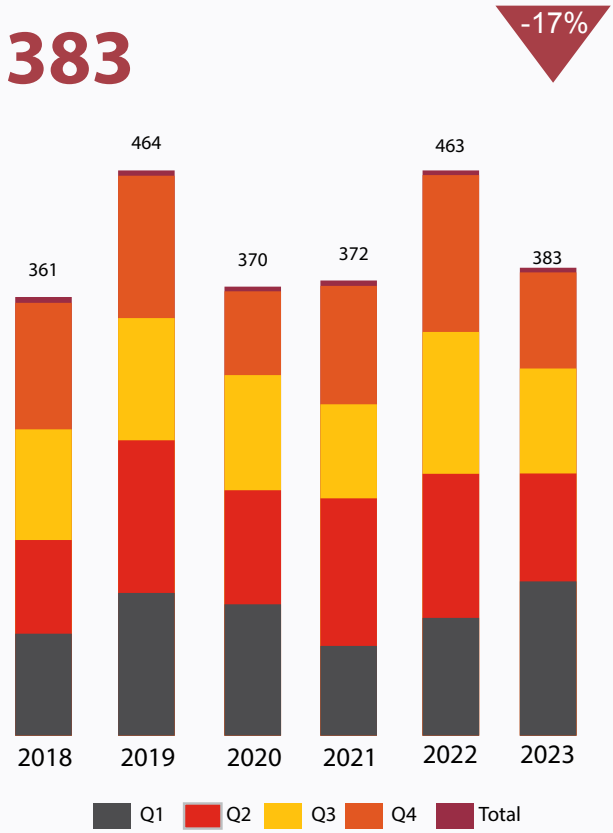
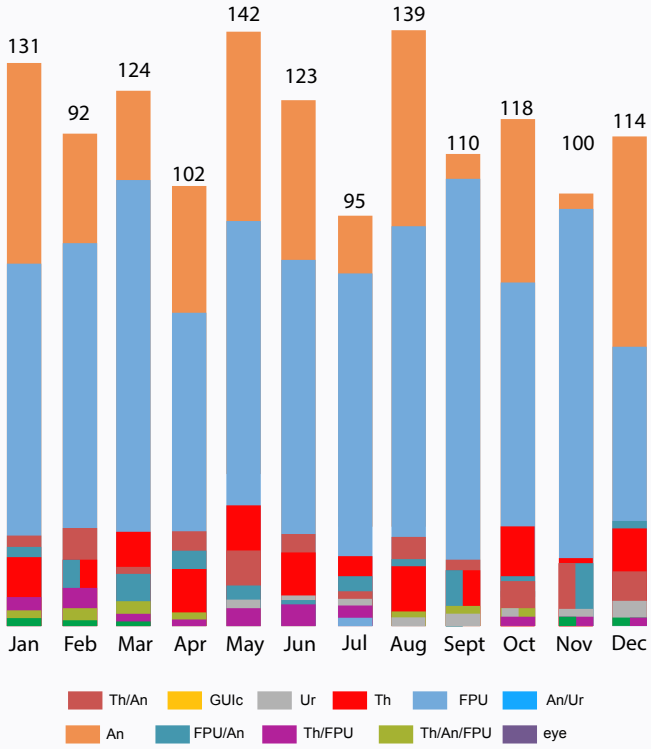


Figure 5 **Sites of chlamydia infections among 3,145 males in 2023**



List of abbreviations: FPU – first pass urine; An – anal; Ur – urethral, Th – throat, GUlc – genital ulcer

Figure 6 **Sites of chlamydia infections among 846 females in 2023**

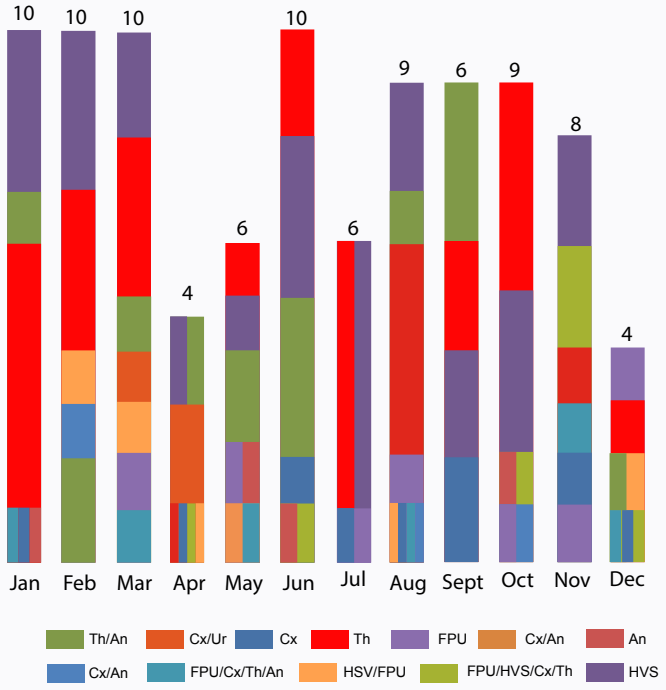


Figure 7 **Sites of gonococcal infections among 2,432 males in 2023**

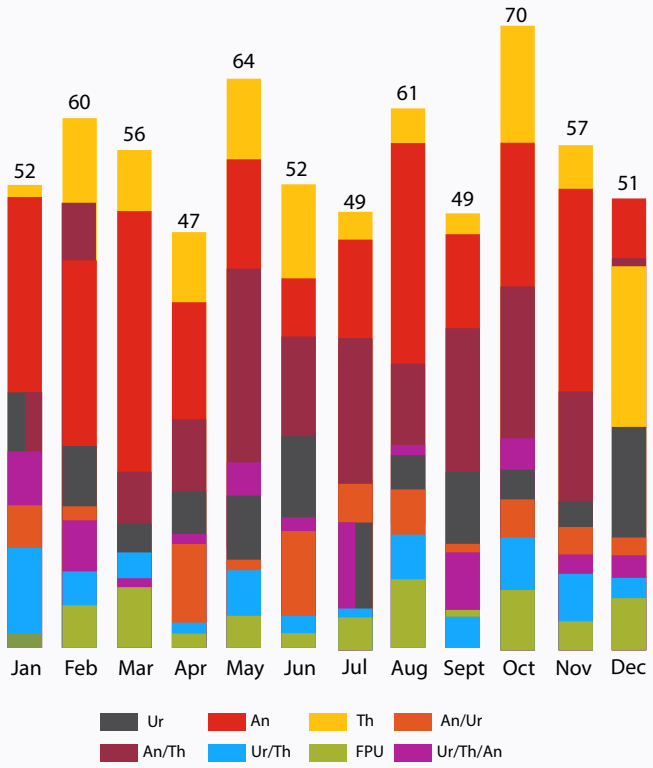


Figure 8 Sites of gonococcal infections among 262 females in 2023

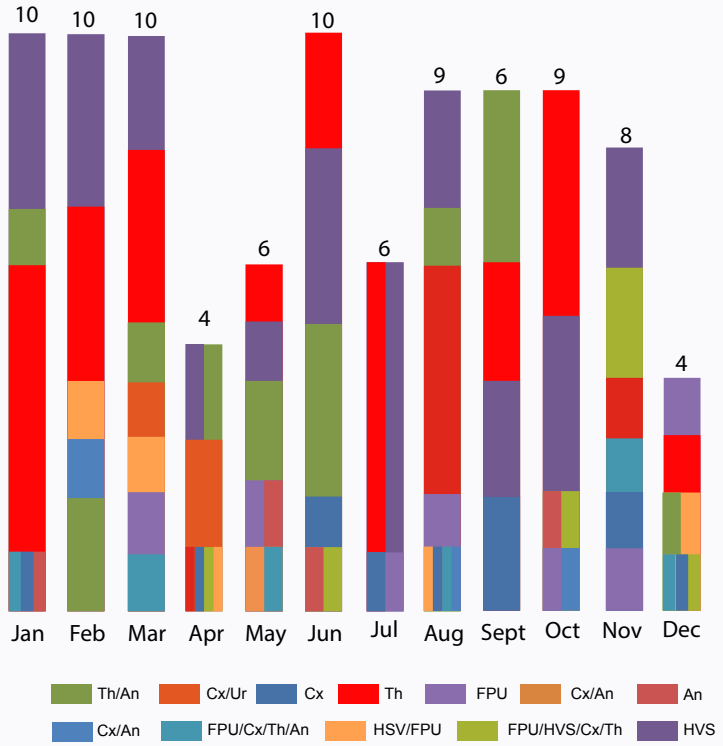


Table 3 Number of HIV and Syphilis tests provided by year

Year	HIV tests (Total)	HIV tests (in MSM)	Syphilis (Total)	Syphilis (in MSM)
2012	15168	6304	18129	8176
2013	17518	7544	20580	9489
2014	18666	8500	21881	10674
2015	20499	9931	23630	12199
2016	23307	12241	26443	14549
2017	25686	13753	29161	16332
2018	31315	15378	35245	18024
2019	31978	15008	36350	18043
2020	18900	9560	22650	12233
2021	20962	10559	24933	13382
2022	24440	12339	28610	15280
2023	26772	12603	31293	15773

MSM= men who have sex with men

The numbers of HIV and syphilis tests over time has doubled since 2012 to 2019 and are slowly increasing to pre-covid 19 numbers (Table 5; Figures 9 and 10)

Figure 9 **Numbers of HIV tests taken over time**

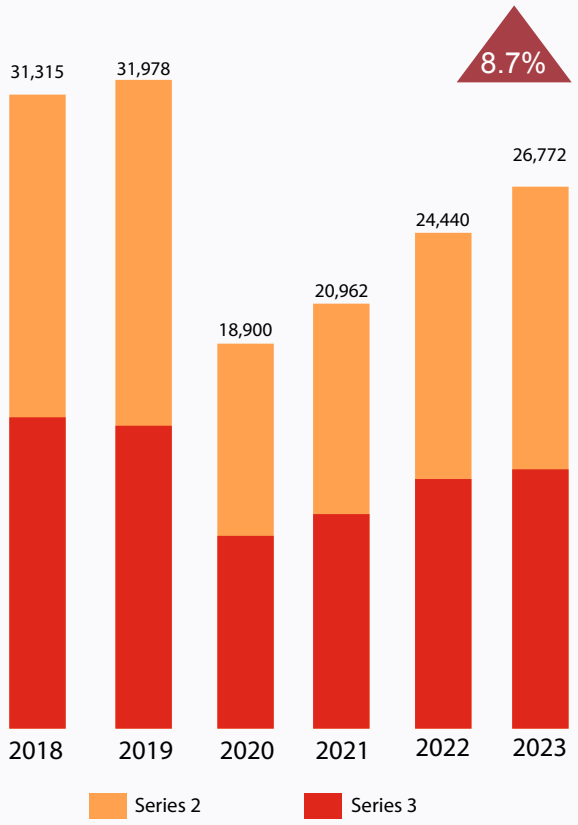
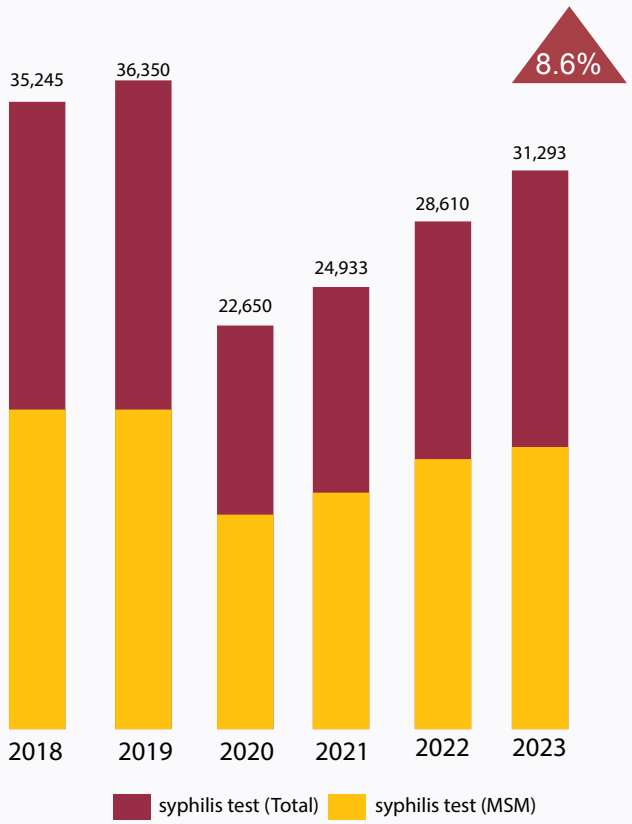


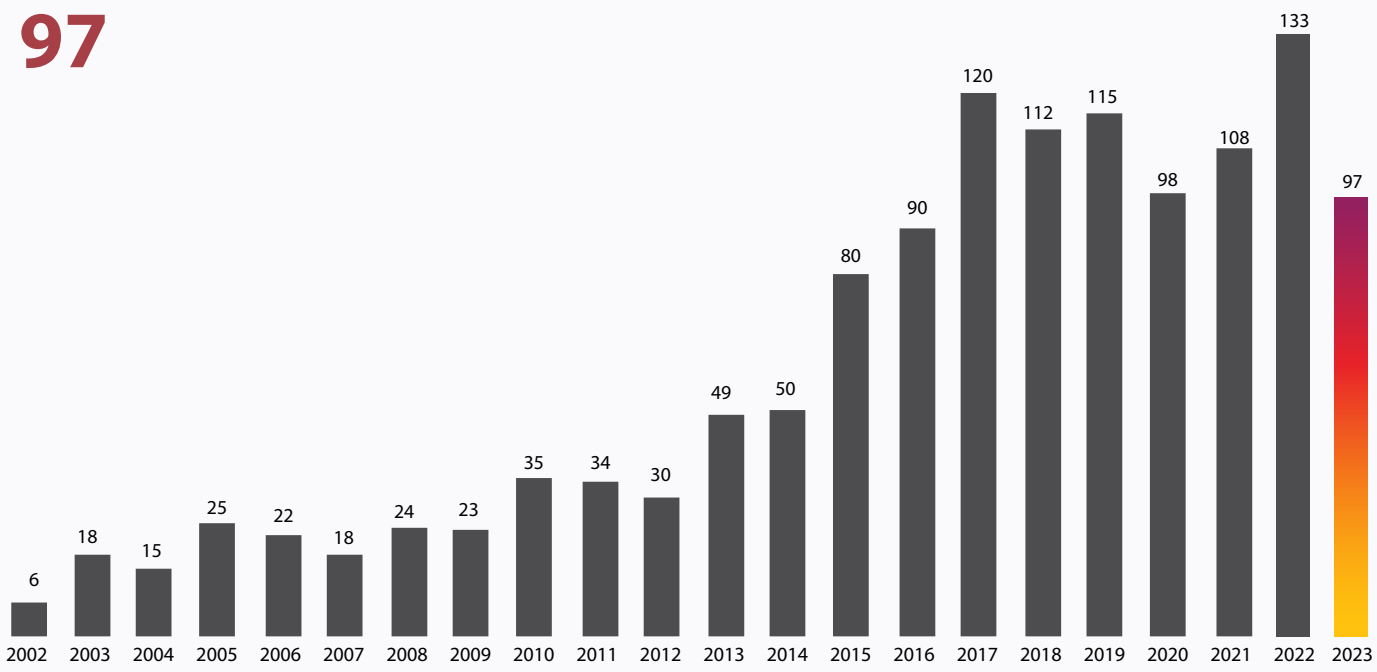
Figure 10 **Numbers of Syphilis tests taken over time**



Publications since 2002

The number of publications in peer reviewed journals has grown particularly over the last 10 years reflecting the dynamic team of research and clinical staff at the Centre Team

Number of Publications



LIST OF PUBLICATIONS 2023

1. Chow EPF, Lew C, Tran J, Phillips TR, Maddaford K, Fairley CK. Understanding the duration of tongue kissing among female sex workers for potential oropharyngeal-oropharyngeal gonorrhoea transmission. **Sexually Transmitted Infections** 2023; 99(1): 75-76 *doi:10.1136/sextrans-2022-055444*

2. Aung ET, Fairley CK, Ong JJ, Chen MY, Phillips TR, Tran J, Samra R, Chow EPF. Incidence and risk factors for early syphilis among men who have sex with men in Australia, 2013-2019: A retrospective cohort study. **Open Forum Infectious Diseases** 2023; 10(2): ofad017 *doi:10.1093/ofid/ofad017*

3. Chow EPF, Chen MY, Bradshaw CS, Towns JM, Fairley CK. Accessing first doses of mpox vaccine made available in Victoria, Australia. **The Lancet Regional Health - Western Pacific** 2023; 31:100712 *doi:10.1016/j.lanwpc.2023.100712*

4. Xu X, Chow EPF, Fairley CK, Chen MY, Aguirre I, Goller J, Hocking JS, Carvalho N, Zhang L, Ong JJ. Determinants and prediction of *Chlamydia trachomatis* re-testing and re-infection within one year among heterosexuals with chlamydia attending a sexual health clinic. **Frontiers in Public Health** 2023; 10 *doi: 10.3389/fpubh.2022.1031372*

5. Abraham E, Chow EPF, Fairley CK, Lee D, Kong FYS, Mao L, Goller JL, Medland M, Bavinton BR, Dusarto B, Joksic S, Wong J, Phillips TR, Ong, JJ. eSexualHealth: Preferences to use technology to promote sexual health among men who have sex with men and trans and gender diverse people. **Frontiers in Public Health** 2023; 10 *doi: 10.3389/fpubh.2022.1064408*

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