

“GP was uncomfortable discussing sexual health/ family planning; it made me feel uncomfortable to discuss anything with her again.”

## Sexual and reproductive health

Improving sexual and reproductive health (SRH) is not only about physical wellbeing – it includes the right to healthy and respectful relationships, inclusive health services, safe and appropriate access to accurate information, testing, treatment and timely support and services (including access to affordable contraception).

Everyone should feel confident to access inclusive SRH health services free from stigma, racism and discrimination, regardless of their gender, gender identity, cultural identity, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, disability status or residential location.

“My experience of undergoing a termination in [Gippsland town] was an arduous process with unnecessary delays due to local medical clinics being unable to issue the prescription ... [for medical termination].”

### Abortion

Abortion can either be a medical (by taking tablets, up to nine weeks) or surgical termination of pregnancy. In Victoria, it is legal to have an abortion up to 24 weeks of pregnancy and in certain situations, beyond this.



In Australia it is estimated that half of all pregnancies are unplanned and half of those will be terminated



Between one quarter and one third of Australian women will experience abortion in their lifetime



A survey found that **26%** of women who have ever been pregnant have had an abortion;

**10.5%** had a medical termination

**17.6%** had a surgical termination

### Community perspective

- Stigma, discrimination and racism are main barriers for seeking information, support and referral for SRH.
- Clinicians are not always willing or confident in providing patients with SRH information.
- Privacy concerns related to accessing diagnostic service providers, pharmacies and general practice.
- Young people’s exposure to pornography can lead to using pornography as a form of “sex education”.
- Sexual assault reports in Gippsland are increasing.
- Lack of knowledge about consent and respectful relationships.
- LGBTIQ people look for services displaying inclusivity to feel safe. Information should not be gendered.

### Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)



**Chlamydia** is the most common STI in Gippsland

High rates in Baw Baw with **28.1** notifications per 10,000 females (Vic 18.5) and **17.3** notifications per 10,000 males (Vic 16.8)



People aged 15 to 29 years account for around **80%** of notifications



Modelling suggests that **77%** of chlamydia cases remain undiagnosed



Asymptomatic infection results in untreated disease, ongoing transmission and increased risk of complications



**Gonorrhoea** notifications are increasing in Gippsland



**Syphilis** notifications are increasing in women as well as in men who have sex with men



Rates of STIs among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Victoria are around twice as high compared to non-Aboriginal people



People in rural and remote areas have lower STI testing rates and experience poorer health outcomes

### Pregnancy and birth in Gippsland



**16.7%** of women smoke during pregnancy (first 20 weeks) (compared to 9.1% in Australia) - highest in Latrobe at **23.4%**



**30%** more live births by mothers aged 15-19 years per population in Gippsland compared to Australia - twice as many in Latrobe



**51.3%** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in Gippsland smoke during pregnancy – this is the highest rate of any PHN in Australia (43.4%)



**6.3%** low birth weight babies (<2,500 grams at birth) (6.6% in Australia)



**15.4%** of Aboriginal babies in Gippsland were low birth weight – this is the highest rate of any PHN in Australia (11.2%)

### Gippsland service gaps include:



Affordable, safe, inclusive and accessible local abortion options, including medical abortion



Inclusive services for young people, LGBTIQ people and people who experience family violence



Specialist obstetricians and gynaecologists, sexual assault and rape services



Culturally safe services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including maternity services

### Sexual and reproductive health services and supports

**1800MyOptions (1800696784)**. Health professionals can refer patients directly or contact **1800MyOptions** for patient referral options.

**Pharmacies** for emergency contraception and medical termination with pregnancy medications.

**Clinic 281** at 281 Main Street, Bairnsdale for young people up to the age of 35 years. Referrals are not required.

**The Melbourne Sexual Health Centre (MSHC)** will partner with eligible general practices in Gippsland to provide expert sexual health training and support. This includes Yarram District Health Service partnering from April 2022.

**The Royal Women's Hospital, Clinical Champion Network** is a state-wide program that aims to improve access to safe and effective medical and surgical abortion, and long acting contraception care.

**Gippsland Women's Health (GWH)** is the lead agency for the Gippsland Sexual and Reproductive Health Strategy. [enquiries@gwhealth.asn.au](mailto:enquiries@gwhealth.asn.au)

**Gippsland Centre Against Sexual Assault (GCASA)** available to anyone in Gippsland who has ever experienced, or been impacted by, sexual assault.

#### Gippsland PHN supported services

The four **headspace** centres in Gippsland offer SRH services to young people

**Gippsland HealthPathways** Private referral options to gynecologists and obstetricians practicing in Gippsland.

### Evidence-based education and training.

**General practices** across Gippsland are supported to provide free condoms, together with information about STI testing and consent.

#### The COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on service provision

Reductions in antenatal care and a change to more telehealth service delivery

Access to affordable abortion services became more difficult, especially in rural and regional areas

Delays in accessing STI testing, contraception and cervical cancer screening.

#### Sexual health resources

**Centre for Excellence in Sexual Health** – online training modules and other clinical resources.

**Sexual Health Victoria** – information, clinical resources and relationship and sexuality education.

**Thorne Harbour Health** – a range of services for sexuality and gender diverse communities – including HIV & AIDS testing and management.

**Let Them Know** – helps people who have been diagnosed with an STI to tell their sexual partners that they might also be at risk via SMS or email, with the option to remain anonymous.

**TESTme** – free test kits for rural Victorians aged 25 years or younger, men who have sex with men and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.