



# Experiences of sexual health testing: Findings from qualitative interviews with Western Australian youth

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## Background

Young peoples' motivations to access sexual health care, along with their experiences of sexual health testing are important considerations for health policy and service delivery. Previous research has suggested that stigma, cost and practitioner judgement may lead young people to delay accessing testing services for sexually transmissible infections (STIs). However, the Western Australian context is not well understood. As young people are identified as a key priority group in national and state STI strategies, it is important to understand how youth have experienced sexual health testing, and to seek their recommendations for service optimisation.

## Methods

Qualitative interviews were conducted with young people aged 18 to 25, living in the Perth metropolitan area. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, or through video conferencing. Thematic analysis was conducted on interview transcripts to identify common themes and subthemes, with NVivo software used to code and manage the data.

## Findings

Eighteen interviews (6 cisgender male, 12 cisgender female; 10 heterosexual, 8 other sexual orientation) were conducted. **Five overall themes were identified that addressed both positive and negative experiences of testing, and motivations to access STI-related services.** Experiences of testing were similar, with many highlighting how **practitioner judgement and/or assumptions made about their sexual practices made them uncomfortable, and the real or perceived costs of testing were significant barriers to accessing the service.** Although many participants reflected on prior negative experiences, it is important to note **specialised, knowledgeable, and supportive practitioners were desired,** and contributed to experiences they noted as positive.

Participants provided insight into **how service delivery could be improved** or streamlined. This included:

- **Availability of telehealth sexual health services**
- **Co-location of practitioners and pathology collection services**
- **Introduction of text-based annual reminders**
- **All test results to be communicate, specifically negative test results**

## Where to now?

These findings provide an insight into how Western Australian young people have experienced sexual health testing, and what factors motivate them to access services. Changes to STI-related services, informed by youth perspectives, should be implemented to increase testing rates and to ensure contemporary, high-quality care for this priority population.

This work was supported by funding from the WA Department of Health, Sexual Health and Bloodborne Virus Program.

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