



STIs in Gay Men Action Group



Health

South Eastern Sydney
Local Health District

Media Release

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Australian-first online module to provide ‘gay friendly’ training option for General Practitioners

General Practitioners (GPs) and practice nurses seeking to become more ‘gay friendly’ in their practice now have the option to complete a short training module online, through the Australian-first Online Learning Module (OLM) - *Becoming More Gay Friendly in your Practice*.

Developed by the STIs in Gay Men Action Group (STIGMA), the OLM focuses and guides GPs on the diversity of health needs commonly experienced by gay and homosexually active men. In particular, sexual health screening, including sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV testing, as well as some psycho-social issues experienced by gay or homosexually active men.

Dr Chris Bourne, Head, NSW STI Programs Unit and Senior Staff Specialist, Sydney Sexual Health Centre, said gay or homosexually active men in Australia are disproportionately affected by STIs, including HIV, and most diagnoses in Australia are made by GPs.

“It is important for everyone to feel comfortable when visiting a GP. For gay or homosexually active men, GPs play an important role in helping them assess their sexual health risk and providing opportunities to test for STI and HIV,” he said.

“The OLM aims to help GPs deliver care which is inclusive of gay or homosexually active men; where they feel safe and free from discrimination and can be offered current professional health advice.”

Dr David Baker, a GP at East Sydney Doctors, says the OLM training highlights the diverse health needs of gay and homosexually active men, which encompass primary health care, current trends in sexual health, understanding of gay culture and its diversity.

“As a GP, it’s important to become confident in identifying common health issues faced by gay and homosexually active men, particularly when it comes to their sexual health,” Dr Baker said.

“The STIGMA Group OLM is an excellent resource for GPs who want to know more about being ‘gay friendly’ in their clinical practice and how to address and work with health issues specific to gay and homosexually active men.

“The knowledge gained from the OLM enables GPs to have a more informed perspective. As an example, when GPs take a comprehensive sexual health history during the patient’s first visit, being ‘gay friendly’ makes it easier for patients who identify as gay or men who are homosexually active, to open up a discussion about STI risk, STI testing, drug and alcohol use and mental health.”

South Eastern Sydney Local Health District

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The *Becoming More Gay Friendly in your Practice* OLM was developed by the STIGMA Group, following its development of a 'Gay Friendly GP List' for NSW, to support access to the primary health care needs of gay and homosexually active men.

Karen Price, Director, HIV and Sexual Health ACON and Chair of the STIGMA Group, said GPs play an important role, given they are identifying a significant proportion of the HIV diagnoses in NSW.

"We know that it is very important that gay and homosexually active men feel that their GP is non-judgemental and able to have an informed discussion with them about their health needs," Ms Price said.

"ACON welcome this initiative, and hopes that GPs take the opportunity to strengthen their understanding of HIV and other sexual health issues, aspects of gay culture, and the range of other issues that play out for gay and other homosexually active men.

"We hope that this model of the OLM enables more GPs to feel confident about having discussions with their gay and homosexually active patients, and that these discussions may lead to more regular testing, and where necessary, early treatment."

The OLM is structured in three interactive web-based modules with some case studies. The modules include: towards a better understanding of gay men and men who have sex with men (MSM), discussing sexual history and testing for STIs, and common health issues facing gay men and MSM. The OLM can be completed over one hour or 20 minutes for each module.

GPs and practice nurses can access the OLM by going to the Australasian Society for HIV Medicine Learning Management System <https://lms.ashm.org.au/>, registering or logging on, then clicking on the Catalogue tab.

The OLM is an accredited Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) activity. GPs who complete the OLM in full can accrue two Cat.2 RACGP QI and Continuing Professional Development points. The OLM has also been endorsed by the Australasian Sexual Health Alliance.

The STIGMA Group is a public health partnership formed in 2000 to provide leadership, strategic direction and a coordinated response in reducing and preventing STIs amongst gay and homosexually active men in inner Sydney.

Current partners of the STIGMA Group are:

- ACON (formerly known as AIDS Council of NSW)
- Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations
- Australasian Society for HIV Medicine
- Centre for Social Research in Health
- Eastern Sydney Medicare Local
- Inner West Sydney Medicare Local
- Kirby Institute
- Northern Sydney Local Health District (Clinic 16, HIV and Related Programs (HARP) Team, Public Health Unit)
- NSW Ministry of Health
- Positive Life NSW
- South Eastern Sydney Local Health District (Albion Centre, HARP Unit, Public Health Unit, Short Street Sexual Health Centre and Sydney Sexual Health Centre)
- Sydney Local Health District (RPA Sexual Health Clinic, HARP Health Promotion, Public Health Unit)
- Sydney North Shore and Beaches Medicare Local.