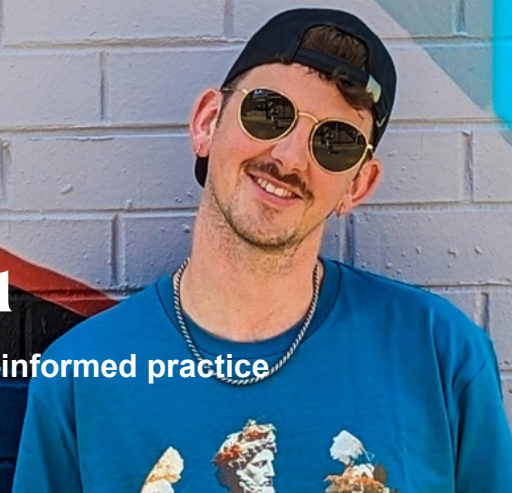


Follow the data

The value of Community Periodic Surveys in evidence-informed practice



WAAC working together with the University of New South Wales (UNSW) and the Kirby Institute to find out more about health issues facing gay, bisexual, and queer men in Perth. Here's what that means for you.

The GBQ+ Community Periodic Surveys are repeated cross-sectional surveys of gay, bisexual, and queer men, and non-binary people who have sex with gay, bisexual and queer men (GBQ+).

The Surveys offer powerful insights into evolving community sexual practices and have played a crucial role in informing health promotion responses and clinical practice.

In Western Australia, the first community periodic survey was conducted in 1998. John Howard was Prime Minister, a little company called Google Inc. had just been founded, and highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) had emerged as the new standard in HIV care.

In that year, over 800 people completed that survey, and over three-quarters of the respondents knew at least one person living with HIV (over half knew at least three). Additionally, almost a third of respondents knew at least three people who had died from AIDS-related complications.

Each new WA Periodic Survey documents a 'chapter' in the GBQ+ community's history and the impact of developments in clinical science and population health policy and practice. When read together, the Surveys chronicle the journey of a resilient community willing to learn about and adopt new knowledge and innovations to achieve one of the greatest public health success stories of our time.

For example, in the 2002 survey, less than 20% of respondents knew about the availability of prophylaxis (PEP); by 2021, the proportion exceeded 80%. Similarly, in 2014, less than a quarter of respondents had heard of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). Less than a decade later, 93.5% of survey participants reported PrEP awareness (2023 data). Additionally, over a third of survey respondents reported using PrEP in the previous 12 months.

Such phenomenal progress ought to be celebrated. However, the challenge for the sector is to not allow these shining examples of success to blind us to the areas in which continued improvements

can be made. The path to virtual elimination requires ongoing vigilance.

[The 2023 GBQ+ Community Periodic Survey Report for Western Australia](#) points to several areas for attention in community, clinical, and public health responses to HIV and other sexual health issues.

In particular:

- Less than one-third of respondents reported having heard a lot about mpox (despite an outbreak in May 2022). [In light of recent reports of new mpox cases in Australia](#), it is important to continue to promote messages about the importance of mpox vaccination. WAAC's website has information for patients and community members. Information for clinicians is available through the [WA Department of Health](#).
- Between 2016 and 2023 there have been significant decreases in the number of HIV-positive respondents who reported a throat swab (from 75.7% to 53.5%) or a blood test for syphilis

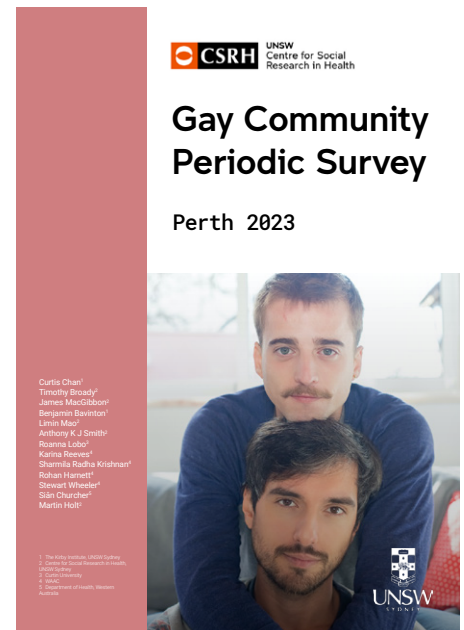
(from 83.8% to 65.1%). [Under clinical guidelines](#), all people living with HIV should receive quarterly syphilis tests unless they are not sexually active or otherwise at risk. Throat swabs should also be considered as part of regular STI testing given the prevalence of oral gonorrhoea. In [2021](#), 44% of gonorrhoea notifications in WA GBQ+ people were detected through throat specimens.

- Mobile apps (50.5%) and the internet (31.9%) remain the most common modes for meeting male sex partners. However, there have been increases in the number of respondents reporting meeting male sex partners at dance parties (11.8%), beats (10.7%) and at gay saunas/sex venues (23.2%). It is important to ensure that we adapt our health promotion messages and interventions to these spaces to ensure that they remain accessible and relevant.
- The proportion of respondents reporting the use of amyl nitrate (poppers) in the six months prior to the survey increased from 35.8% in 2021

to 40.6% in 2023 ($p < 0.05$). [An Australian study](#) of GBQ+ people who engage in chem sex found that a large proportion “worried about being judged by health professionals for their engagement in chem sex” and would not feel comfortable discussing chem sex with most health professionals. A number of [training resources](#) exist to assist health professionals build their competence in this space.

As clinicians, health promotion practitioners and service planners, it is imperative to remain engaged with tools like the GBQ+ Community Periodic Surveys that provide data-driven insights into the evolving health needs and behaviours of the community we serve. By integrating the findings from these surveys into our evidence-informed practices, we can tailor our interventions to be both effective and sensitive to the diverse experiences within the GBQ+ population. The data from these surveys are not just numbers—they are reflections of real lives, guiding us towards better health outcomes and reinforcing our commitment to the health and well-being of the GBQ+ community.

For more information on the GBQ+ Study visit: <https://www.unsw.edu.au/research/csrh/our-projects/gbq-community-periodic-surveys>



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