



Dear Dr Alexander

Sexual Health Society of Queensland (SHSQ) Statement on the reduction of Sexual Health and HIV services being offered in Brisbane.

The provision of free, easily accessible, anonymous and confidential State-funded specialist sexual health and HIV clinics **is a pivotal strategy** for the successful prevention and control of sexually transmissible infections (STI) and HIV.

The decision to close the free public sexual health clinical services in the Metro North area flies in face of a fundamental principle of public health best practice. It may be providing a short-term solution to the fiscal demands of providing health care in the greater metro north area, however, the Sexual Health Society of Queensland question if sufficient consideration has been given to the long-term consequences this decision will have on the sexual health and well-being of the community, in addition to the future health care costs associated with managing complications such as late stage syphilis, PID or infertility and of course chronic HIV infection. The closure of the sexual health clinical and educational services provided by Brisbane Sexual Health and HIV Service will result in this service having limited capacity to provide ongoing services as the key specialist sexual health referral point for GPs and other primary health care and community organisations.

Brisbane Sexual Health and HIV Service (BSHHS) has always worked in partnership with their primary health care, GP and community based partners and the Sexual Health Society of Queensland acknowledge the key role these partners play in providing sexual health care. However, BSHHS is the primary provider of specialist sexual health care to populations and individuals at high risk of STI and HIV in the Metro North area of Brisbane. Queensland community members who are at increased risk of STI and HIV are often reluctant or unable to access mainstream health professional due to uncertainty about the reception they will receive regarding their sexual orientation, sexual behaviour and life choices. Consideration also needs to be given to how the reduction of the free walk-in sexual health services will affect our young community members who continue to have the highest rates of Chlamydia. Are we willing to sacrifice the health of our young people for short-term financial gain?

Put a **full stop to H.I.V.** is a Queensland Government priority, however, reducing access to free public sexual health services will potentially increase the community STI burden which may well result in further increases in new HIV diagnosis: **not E.N.D H.I.V.** The proposed reduction of sexual health services will also significantly limit access for Metro North residents to the Queensland Government initiative of free HIV Rapid Test at local sexual health clinics.

A wealth of expertise and specialist knowledge in clinical practice, research and education has been built up amongst the medical, nursing and allied health staff at BSHHS. The loss of over thirty of these health care professionals will result in reduced service provision along with the loss of the specialist State-wide liaison role this service provides. The long-term repercussions of this decision are far too serious to contemplate.

For the above reasons the Sexual Health Society of Queensland ask that the Metro North Health and Hospital Service urgently reconsider their decision to close the free walk-in sexual health clinical services provided by Brisbane Sexual Health and HIV Service (BSHHS) at 'Biala'.

Yours sincerely,

Ms Judith Dean

President Sexual Health Society of Queensland