

Message from the Minister for Health



Aboriginal people in Western Australia are disproportionately affected by STIs and BBVs, which are a significant public health issue if not prevented, detected early and treated. Whilst important achievements have been made, there is still significant work to be done to reduce the incidence and prevalence of STIs and BBVs amongst Aboriginal communities in WA. There is a clear need for effective prevention, early detection and treatment of STIs and BBVs to reduce the prevalence and impact of these infections on communities. It is essential to consider all components in planning and implementing programs and services including culturally appropriate prevention and education, accessible testing and treatment, contact tracing, a skilled workforce, availability of health hardware, timely surveillance reports, research, evaluation and enabling environments.

To support the public health and primary healthcare service providers in rural and remote regions to plan, deliver, monitor and evaluate comprehensive STI and BBV programs, the WA Department of Health has developed a comprehensive manual.

The Manual was developed in joint partnership with WA public health practitioners and co-designed with representatives from the Aboriginal community controlled sector with expertise in public health and clinical management of STIs and BBVs.

This manual aims to complement a number of existing strategic documents developed by the Department of Health, including the *WA Aboriginal Sexual Health and Blood-borne Virus Strategy 2019–2023* and the *WA Syphilis Outbreak Response Action Plan*. Combined, these documents provide a framework and guiding principles to support public health programs and primary care services to address STIs and BBVs.

In light of the STI and BBV trends in WA, there is a need for a comprehensive public health response and innovative, community-led approaches to address these issues. The syphilis outbreak that commenced in WA in 2014 calls for increased and strengthened efforts in regional and remote WA to control the spread infectious syphilis and prevent congenital syphilis cases.

The introduction of new hepatitis C treatments in 2016 is also an exciting opportunity for health professionals working in this field and the affected populations. This has been incorporated into the Manual to provide guidance for the workforce to increase access, uptake and adherence to the treatment.

The Manual is demonstrative of a statewide commitment to addressing STIs and BBVs. I hope it provides the service providers with a reference tool that is easy to use to aid the vital work necessary in regional and remote WA to control STIs and BBVs.



Honourable Roger Cook MLA
Minister for Health