

Report on the findings of our Sexual Health Need Survey for people age 45+

1. Why?

Epidemiological evidence at a national and regional level indicates increasing rates of sexually transmitted infections among 'older' people (45+). This has led to concerns around:

- Whether sexual health materials and resources are adequately designed and structured to reach older people
- The poor quality of primary SRE which older people may have experienced (in particular, a lack of clarity around the difference between preventing infection and preventing unwanted pregnancies).
- The fact that current targeting strategies may inadvertently neglect older people (through choice of venues and promotion networks)

DHIVERSE has a long history of targeting high prevalence groups and those who are seldom heard– but has yet to make significant progress in determining and addressing the specific sexual health needs of older people. This survey is a first step towards assessing these needs on a local basis (within Cambridgeshire and Peterborough) and developing a robust strategy to tackle the sexual health needs of older people.

2. What did we do?

A questionnaire (see Appendix) was designed for electronic and hard copy distribution. The survey was open from the end of June until early August 2017. Individual questions were designed to elicit:

- Information on age related variation within the '45+' category. DHIVERSE recognises this comprises a large group which is likely to vary along age-related lines – particularly in relation to issues around employment, housing and the impact of chronic illness and disability.
- Gender - relatively little work has been reported on the intersection between gender and age and its effect on sexual health needs.
- The knowledge base around HIV and sexually transmitted infections possessed by older people.
- Feedback on how older people feel about the sexual health information and resources they have come in contact with.
- Feedback on the potential involvement of respondents (as volunteers or sexual health champions) in targeted sexual health promotion programmes.

An electronic version of the questionnaire was disseminated to all DHIVERSE contacts and promoted on our website from the end of June to 31 July 2017. Further hard copy questionnaires were disseminated at outreach and health promotion events forming part of our 'A Summer of Safer Sex' Campaign (including a presence at 'Unity in the Community' in Huntingdon and the Cambridge Rock Festival).

3. Responses and Analysis

216 replies were received from survey monkey and a further 24 hard copy responses were received – a total of 240 responses.

- **Breakdown by Age**

80 per cent of responses were from people under 55, and only 5% from those over 65. So responses would over-represent those most likely to be employed and under-represent older individuals who would be more likely to live in supported accommodation and experience chronic illness and disabilities. This highlights the need to gather more information on older segments of the '45+' population (see below).

- **Gender**

The gender distribution of respondents was balanced, with 49% identifying as cis male and 50% as cis female, 1% identified as trans people.

- **Recent Sexual History**

17% of respondents had had more than one sexual partner during the previous twelve months, and 21% of respondents had had a sexual health check-up at a clinic. The latter figure in particular suggested a higher level of uptake of sexual health services among older people than has often been assumed. The vast majority (77%) of respondents who had gone for a sexual health check-up during the previous twelve months stated as their reason for so doing that 'having a regular sexual health check-up was important' rather than specific worries around unprotected sex or a change of partners. This is consistent with the fact that 45% of those individuals who had received check-ups had not changed partners or experienced unprotected sex. Conversely only 54% of those who had experienced a change of partners or unprotected sex during the previous twelve months had gone for a sexual health check-up.

Although men were more likely to have attended a sexual health clinic within the previous 12 months (26 % as opposed to 10%), women who had not changed partners or experienced unprotected sex were significantly more likely to seek sexual check-ups compared to men in a similar position.

Although almost all respondents were aware that older people could catch HIV or other sexually transmitted infection, 17% thought that there was no point in wearing a condom

if your partner couldn't get pregnant - possibly indicating confusion over the role of contraception and protection from infection.

- **Resources and Involvement**

An overwhelming majority of respondents felt that more information and resources on sexual health should be available to older people (76%) – of those 60% felt that more information should be available on line, 10% via posters or flyers and 17% through organisational support and outreach.

33% of respondents were interested in taking an active and collaborative role in developing sexual health resources for older people in conjunction with DHIVERSE and 12% were interested in becoming sexual health champions.

4. Where do we go from here?

- **Gathering more Information**

As noted above most respondents were aged under 65 – more work needs to be done to target those older than 65, in order to assess their specific needs, and build an integrated program to tackle the sexual health needs of older people.

DHIVERSE will be conducting further partnership work with Age UK, U3A and local supported housing to investigate ways of reaching out to over-65s.

- **Designing Resources**

DHIVERSE will be contacting all respondents who were willing and interested in being contacted to provide feedback on current sexual health resources used by DHIVERSE and our partners and with details of an engagement exercise to develop new health promotion materials targeted at those over 45. We hope to have contacted everyone by mid-December 2017 with a view to opening discussions about next steps in the New Year.

- **Training Sexual Health Champions**

DHIVERSE will be contacting the 12% of respondents who expressed an interest in the 'Sexual Health Champion' programme with training details through 2017/18.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who responded to the survey and to those of you who would like further involvement with Dhiverse.

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