

Having a sexual and reproductive health chat with a migrant or refugee client

What is sexual and reproductive health? Sexual and reproductive health, or SRH, is a fundamental human right and is not just the absence of infection or illness in a person. It refers to complete physical, mental and social well-being¹. SRH can cover fertility and births, family planning and contraception, as well as reproductive and sexual health and related infections. SRH can include medical care, education and other support services.

Why is sexual and reproductive health important to discuss with migrant and refugee clients?

Migrant and refugee populations in Australia have poorer SRH outcomes than other populations. Statistics show migrant and refugee populations have;

- Higher rates of sexually transmitted infections (STI) despite lower testing rates²
- Lower knowledge of contraception options³
- Later access to antenatal (during pregnancy) care³
- Higher rates of unintended pregnancy²

Barriers to accessing SRH services and support for migrant and refugee populations may include;

- Lack of culturally appropriate support³
- Low Health Literacy²
- Language Constraints²
- Financial Concerns² or not knowing that some SRH services are free
- Confidentiality Concerns²
- Medical care can be hard to access; many providers do not accept new clients; have out of pocket expenses; and long wait lists

Discussing SRH can help empower clients to increase their confidence and understanding. It also connects clients with relevant support and health services. Starting the conversation can mean clients access SRH care sooner and have increased likelihood of improved health outcomes.

What does sexual and reproductive health cover?

- Contraception options
- Pre-pregnancy, fertility and pregnancy options including termination of pregnancy
- Sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing and treatment
- Gynaecological (women's) health
- Urological (men's) health
- Cervical screening
- Breast health and breast screening
- Sexual and reproductive function
- Menstruation and menopause
- Pelvic floor health including incontinence
- Vaginal and vulval health including prolapse
- Growth and change, including puberty
- Respectful relationships including cultural customs, male/female interactions, addressing discomfort in conversations, and physical boundaries
- Sexuality, gender and gender identity
- Protective behaviours & sexual safety

Guide to having a successful sexual and reproductive health chat

1. Be culturally aware: Remember to be culturally sensitive through non-judgemental observation and awareness. Ask your client their preferences to determine who is an appropriate support worker for them and meet these preferences wherever possible. This can be quite personal. Your client may prefer a support worker from the same or similar cultural or language background, someone of a similar age or the same gender, or to have a translating and interpreting support service (TIS). Some people will not discuss their SRH with someone of another gender, and some may need to discuss with their spouse before making any decisions. Consider your clients safety when determining if they should be seen individually or with their partner when discussing their SRH.

2. Build trust and rapport: Make sure there is enough time to comfortably talk, and use an appropriate, private and comfortable place to have the discussion. Providing a glass of water or hot drink can help your client feel more at ease. Use active and reflective listening, ensuring your body language, eye contact and interactions are culturally appropriate. Be considerate and respectful and give your client time to speak and be heard. Express empathy and remain calm, non-judgemental, supportive and inclusive.

3. Ask permission: Always ask your client if it is OK for you to discuss their SRH with them. Explain that conversations are confidential and private. Reassure them of your understanding and awareness that this may be a sensitive topic for them. If your client is not comfortable having the discussion with you, try to understand why and see if there is anything that can be done to make the conversation possible. This might be offering to have a support person present, using TIS services, or, if necessary, the client may be referred to a SRH service for support.

4. Avoid making assumptions:

Be open and willing to learn about your client. Ask clear and simple questions to understand what the client knows about their SRH, support options and if they have any concerns. Be mindful to avoid bringing cultural bias into the conversation as this could influence your interactions and the outcomes of the discussion. Consider all aspects of SRH, not just the obvious. SRH is important for people at all ages and stages of life.

5. Overcome language barriers:

Use plain English, avoid using medical jargon or acronyms and check for your clients understanding. Explain that many SRH services can offer information in language and interpreters can be arranged. Translation and interpreting services (TIS National) can be an important option to consider to avoid any miscommunication or misinterpretation, particularly when needing to discuss medical content.

In summary, sexual and reproductive health:

- Is an important aspect of health
- Is a fundamental human right
- Can be a challenging topic to discuss
- Can be sensitive and complex for some

Discussing sexual and reproductive health

- Can improve health and wellbeing outcomes
- Doesn't have to be embarrassing
- Can be simple and brief
- Doesn't mean you have to be an expert
- Is to identify any need for support
- Is to connect to further support services

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Sexual and reproductive health referral and support services

South:

Family Planning Tasmania
421 Main Road, Glenorchy,
fpt.org.au (03) 6273 9117

Sexual Health Services - Clinic 60
60 Collins St, Hobart
health.tas.gov.au (03) 6166 2672

Women's Health Tasmania
25 Lefroy St, North Hobart
womenshealthtas.org.au (03) 6231 3212

The Link (*ages 12-24)
57 Liverpool St, Hobart
thelink.org.au (03) 6231 2927

Pulse Youth Health Services (*ages 12-24)
404 Main Road, Glenorchy
findhelptas.org.au (03) 6166 1421

North:

Family Planning Tasmania
3/93 Paterson St, Launceston
fpt.org.au (03) 6343 4566

Sexual Health Services - Clinic 34
34 Howick St, Launceston
health.tas.gov.au (03) 6777 1371

North West:

Family Planning Tasmania
199 Mount St, Upper Burnie
fpt.org.au (03) 6431 7692

Sexual Health Services - Clinic 23 (outreach)
23 Steele Street, Devonport
health.tas.gov.au (03) 6777 1371

Multilingual Resources:

Translating and Interpreting Services (TIS National)
tisonational.gov.au 131 450

Multicultural Centre for Women's Health - mcwh.com.au
Sexual Health Victoria - shvic.org.au

Family Planning NSW - fpnsw.org.au

Health Translations - healthtranslations.vic.gov.au

Support Services

24/7 Sexual Assault Support line State-wide
1800 697 877

Sexual Assault Support Services (South)
sass.org.au
31-33 Tower Rd, New Town (03) 6231 0044

Laurel House Sexual Assault Support (North)
laurelhouse.org.au (03) 6334 2740

Laurel House Sexual Assault Support (North-west)
laurelhouse.org.au (03) 6431 9711

Family Violence Counselling and Support
1800 608 122

Working it out (LGBTIQ+ support)
workingitout.org.au

278 Argyle St, North Hobart (03) 6231 1200
Holyman House, Brisbane st, Launceston 0438 346 122
North West 0455 031 262

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