

CHRONIC AND INFECTIOUS DISEASES

This infographic summarizes recommendations to improve Indigenous Peoples’ access to sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections (STBBIs) health services, based on the experiences of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis STBBI service users, STBBI service providers, and policy- and decision-makers during the COVID-19 pandemic. This infographic presents findings from the qualitative study, “COVID-19 and Indigenous peoples’ access to STBBI and related health services: A qualitative study”. This study was completed by the National Collaborating Centres for Indigenous Health (NCCIH) and Infectious Diseases (NCCID) in 2021-2022 and involved interviews and focus groups to explore how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the accessibility, availability, and delivery of STBBI health services for First Nations people, Inuit, and Métis people. A full report on the study and related summaries can all be found on the NCCIH and NCCID websites.

Recommendations to improve STBBI health service accessibility, availability, and delivery:

1 Increase education and awareness of STBBIs

STBBI service users spoke about the need to raise awareness of STBBIs and recommended increasing education about the availability of STBBI and harm reduction services.

*“We have a whole new population here [...] they’re younger, they’re coming from all different communities and uh, HIV [...] and STDs and STIs [aren’t] talked about anymore. It’s not brought up and it should be [...] this stuff needs to be known.” (STBBI Service User)*

2 Address anti-Indigenous racism and discrimination

Both STBBI service providers and service users recommended addressing anti-Indigenous racism and discrimination in health care systems and creating culturally safe and judgement-free environments for testing and treatment.

*“More testing where it is not so clinical [and] it’s not so terrifying for somebody.” (STBBI Service User)*

Many interview participants shared about the safe and judgement-free care they received at their usual health service organizations.

*“I went [to our] treatment centre [...] it was, for me, it was healing because I’m healing with my people, I’m healing at home.” (STBBI Service User)*

3 Improve access to self-testing kits and drive-through testing centres

STBBI service providers shared about the uptake in self-testing kits (such as blood tests and self-swabs), especially considering that these testing services were generally met with hesitation prior to the pandemic. They recommended continuing this practice.

4 Update data collection systems from paper-based to online systems

The use of paper-based data collection systems was a challenge for STBBI service providers working remotely, as well as for providers collecting appropriate data that might support efforts in future pandemics. For example, some STBBI service providers described how the collection of demographic information was limited during the pandemic, as services had to prioritize fundamentals, such as testing. This created difficulties to evaluate the accessibility of STBBI services for Indigenous people.

5 Diversify the range of tools & methods for accessing care on an ongoing basis

STBBI service providers recommended ensuring that the structures and mechanisms for accessing STBBI care are flexible to changing environments and demands, as required. For example, this could include providing virtual visits for clients who prefer virtual over in-person appointments.

6 Address and improve conditions related to the social determinants of health

STBBI service providers expressed how systemic change is required to improve the social determinants of health (e.g. living conditions, employment, income) of vulnerable populations. Without addressing these inequities, service providers noted that it was unlikely that STBBI services would see greater success for the next public health emergency or pandemic.

*“Cause a lot of things come up at different times and if money comes up and I’m at this point of unemployment, I’m going to have to take that option as opposed to go get my appointment.” (STBBI Service User)*

Conclusion: Thoughtful service planning and delivery that is built on community knowledge and expertise can improve STBBI care for all!