

Gippsland Condom Vending Machine Initiative

A Report as part of the
Gippsland Sexual and Reproductive
Health Strategy



GIPPSLAND
Sexual and Reproductive Health Alliance



Acknowledgements

This project was funded by the Department of Health and Human Services. Bass Coast Shire Council are to be commended for being the first Gippsland council to install condom vending machines and developing the process for the installation and maintenance of the machines. Bass Coast were key partners in the development of the Are You Covered campaign. The other councils, health services, sporting clubs and community organisations that have been involved in this project include:

- Baw Baw Shire Council
- Devon Welshpool Won Wron Woodside Football Netball Club
- East Gippsland Shire Council
- Gippsland Southern Health Service
- Latrobe City Council
- Maffra Neighbourhood House
- Mallacoota Halls and Recreation Committee
- Morwell Football & Netball Club
- Omeo District Health
- Segue Community Hub & Arts Café
- South Gippsland Shire Council
- Wellington Shire Council
- Yarram Recreation Reserve Inc.
- Gippsport

Although this work has been led by Gippsland Women's Health, the Gippsland Sexual and Reproductive Health Alliance has been crucial in providing contacts to manage the machines and advice on the Are You Covered campaign.

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Executive Summary

The incidence of sexually transmitted infections, particularly in young people in regional Victoria is increasing. This trend is evident in Gippsland's statistics (Women's Health Atlas). The use of condoms is effective in preventing STIs (Holmes, Levine & Weaver 2004).

Research conducted by the Victorian Rural Women's Health Services indicated that privacy and availability were barriers to accessing condoms (Victorian Rural Women's Health Services 2012). The Gippsland Sexual and Reproductive Health Strategy 2013- 2017 included an objective to increase access to condoms and emergency contraception in Gippsland in response to this data. Condom vending machines are a way to overcome privacy and access issues and have been shown to be acceptable to rural communities (Tomnay & Hatch 2013). The Department of Health and Human Services supported this objective by providing funding to Gippsland Women's Health (GWH) to facilitate the installation of condom vending machines in the six Gippsland local governments and in sporting clubs across Gippsland.

The machines and the first 1000 condoms per machine were provided to each council or club. The revenue from the sale of the free condoms plus the profit from the sales of future condoms are used to purchase further stock ensuring the initiative is cost neutral. There are 29 machines across Gippsland with 2 or more machines in each local government area. The machines have been installed primarily in public toilets, preferably in the accessible toilet which makes the purchase private, accessible to all genders as well as to people with a disability. Braille signage was installed on the outside of the toilet door as well as on the condom vending machine.

There have been different models of partnership for the installation and management of the machines. The best outcomes for the project have occurred within the local government areas (LGA) in which the local council has incorporated the project into the Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan and managed the stocking and maintaining of the machines. This has occurred in 3 LGAs to date. In the other 3 LGAs local health services, clubs and community groups have taken on the role of managing the machines. This model of management has in many cases been more problematic due to inconsistent checking of the machines and lack of skills to address minor mechanical faults. It has also proven difficult to collect sales statistics. Sustainability or longevity of the project with this model is also a concern.

From 2014 to 2018 there have been over 4000 condoms sold through the condom vending machines across Gippsland.

The social media campaign 'Are you covered' was developed in partnership with Bass Coast Shire Council. This included business cards, posters and stickers to promote the location of the machines as well as safe and consensual sex. These resources combined with the #areyoucovered instagram account and sexual health information on the GWH website support the Gippsland Sexual and Reproductive Health Strategy 2017-2021 objective 'To increase safe sex practices in young people in Gippsland'.

Background

Teenage pregnancies and the notification rates of Sexually Transmissible Infections (STI's) in Victoria, particularly Chlamydia, have been rising dramatically over the past decade, and regional statistics are markedly higher than metropolitan. Chlamydia is the most frequently reported notifiable infection in Australia. Young people are disproportionately affected: with more than 80% of infections occurring in people under 29 years of age (Victorian Women's Health Atlas). Chlamydia infections that are left untreated can lead to Pelvic Inflammatory Disease and infertility in woman and testicular problems in men. Women disproportionately carry the burden of unwanted or unplanned pregnancy. Teenage pregnancy will often result in negative outcomes including poverty, substance abuse and reduced engagement with education for young mothers and their babies (Victorian Women's Health Atlas 2018).

Condoms are the most effective way to reduce the risk of contracting an STI and act as a contraceptive to reduce unplanned pregnancy. (Crosby RA, et al. Condom effectiveness against non-viral sexually transmitted infections: a prospective study using electronic daily diaries). Research conducted by the Victorian Rural Women's Health Services indicated that privacy and availability were barriers to accessing condoms (Victorian Rural Women's Health Services 2012). Condom vending machines have been found to be acceptable to rural communities (Tomnay & Hatch 2013).

The Victorian government released the Victorian Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health Key Priorities 2017 – 2020 (Department of Health and Human Services 2017) in 2017 and it included four priority areas. Priority area 2 states that 'Victorians have improved access to reproductive choices.' An action to *increase access to information and provision of all forms of contraception* and includes the example of expanding access to condom vending machines in community-based setting.

The Gippsland Sexual and Reproductive Health Strategy 2013- 2017 included an objective to increase access to condoms and emergency contraception in Gippsland. Condom vending machines are a way to overcome these issues. The Gippsland Sexual and Reproductive Health Alliance produced a new strategy for 2017-2021 and have included 'To increase safe sex practice in young people' as an objective under which the condom vending machine initiative would continue.

Method

The Department of Health and Human Services provided funding to Gippsland Women's Health (GWH) to facilitate the installation of condom vending machines in all six local government areas as well as in sporting clubs across Gippsland. All Gippsland Councils' CEOs were invited to participate in the initiative and the project was presented to Councils' social planners.

The uptake by local governments was variable with some councils being early adopters while others agreed to trial the machines for 12 months and some agreed to install the machines but declined to stock and maintain the machines. This meant that different models were used in different municipalities and the project needed to be adjusted to work within the parameters given.

Most local governments had to get approval from their Council and the requirements for the involvement in the project varied. One example of a process used was Baw Baw Shire Council that put the project out for community comment first and then it was discussed at a Council meeting. The Council decided to do a 12 month trial and due to the community benefits of the project the condom vending machines have remained in public toilets and are maintained by council workers.

In the shires where the council did not manage the stocking and maintenance of the machines agreements were made with health services or community organisations. This required individual agreements and further practical support.

GippSport staff invited sporting clubs to participate in the initiative. Two clubs responded and machines were installed.

Memorandums of Understanding for the project were developed between Gippsland Women's Health and the council, sporting club or community group. Gippsland Women's Health provided the condom vending machine plus the first 1000 condoms per machine. Once the free condoms are used then the organisation will buy the condoms directly from the company using the money collected from sales. The condoms are purchased at \$0.72 for 2 and are sold for \$2 which adds further to funding the project and making the project cost neutral.

The machines were installed primarily in public toilets, preferably in the accessible toilet when available to make the condoms accessible for people with a disability as well as being gender neutral. Braille signage was installed on the outside of the toilet door as well as on the condom vending machine to increase accessibility.



Figures 1 & 2: Condom vending machine and Braille signage.

A campaign was created to promote the location of the condom vending machines. This work was initially done in partnership with Bass Coast Shire Council (BCSC) as part of *Schoolies 2015* as Phillip Island is a popular location for Year 12 students to relax and holiday post VCE exams. It has since been expanded into all LGAs across Gippsland. Gippsland Women's Health viewed this as an opportunity to promote the importance of consent, including age of consent and the law. This links with the prevention of violence against women priority which GWH leads in Gippsland.

The Are You Covered campaign includes postcards, wallet sized cards with the location of the machines, stickers and an Instagram campaign. Bass Coast Shire Council also created a QR code for a map with the location of the machines in Bass Coast hosted on the Council website which was included on promotional material. South Gippsland Youth Access Clinic created a google map for the location of the machines in South Gippsland.



Figure 3: Are You Covered postcard resource for Bass Coast



LYAC promoting the CVM locations Sth Gippsland

Results

There are currently 29 condom vending machines installed across Gippsland. There was an additional machine that was being managed by a community organisation but due to issues with continual vandalism maintenance of the machine became too difficult and it was removed.

LGA	Council	Sporting Club	Community Group/Organisation	Health Service
Bass Coast	7			
Baw Baw	6			
East Gippsland			1	1
Latrobe	3	1		
South Gippsland				6
Wellington	1	1	3	

Figure 4: Location of machines

Timeline for installation of Machines

LGA	Number of Machines 2015-2016	Number of Machines 2016-2017	Number of Machines 2017-2018
Bass Coast	6	7	7
Baw Baw	0	6	6
East Gippsland	0	1	2
Latrobe	1	1	4
South Gippsland	0	0	6
Wellington	0	2	4
Total	7	17	29

Figure 5: Condom Vending Machine installation timeline

Sales:

LGA	Condoms sold 2015-2016	Condoms sold 2016-2017	Condoms sold 2017-2018
Bass Coast	618	788	840
Baw Baw	N/A	46	582
East Gippsland	N/A	128	228
Latrobe	N/A	N/A	182
South Gippsland	N/A	N/A	175
Wellington	N/A	208	464
Total	618	1170	2471

Figure 6: Condom sales

Are You Covered campaign

An Instagram page to appeal to young people and include messages about safe and consensual sex, location of condom vending machines and a link to further sexual health information on the GWH website. 179 followers as of 21 December 2018 and 108 posts as of 21 December 2018.

Publicity

Newspaper

- Teen births alarming- South Gippsland Sentinel Times on 28/7/2015.
- Council to seek comment on condoms- Warragul and Drouin Gazette on 31/05/2016
- Vox pop- condom vending machines in the West Gippsland Trader on 2/06/2016
- Improving the sexual health and wellbeing of our community WSC press release in Gippsland Times on 24/11/2016
- Vending machines to improve sexual health- Latrobe Valley Express on 30/10/2017
- Successful trial leads to permanent condoms- Warragul Drouin Gazette on 14/8/2018

TV

- Condom vending machine project- Selena Gillham, GWH on WIN NEWS 25/5/2016
- BBSC keeping condom vending machines- Selena Gillham & Anna Roberts, GWH on WIN NEWS 9/8/2018

Radio

- Condom Vending Machines- Antoinette Mitchell, BCSC- interviewed on ABC Gippsland on 6/8/2015.
- Public vending machines to improve Gippsland youth sexual health- GWH was interviewed for an online article for ABC Gippsland on 10/8/2015.

Presentations/Conferences

- Condom vending machine project submitted as an abstract and GWH worker participated as part of panel at the SEXrurality conference in July 2015
- GWH presented at Women's Health in the East's Sexual Health forum in April 2016 on CVM project
- GWH presented on the 'Are you covered' safe sex social media campaign at the SEXrurality conference in August 2017
- Women's Health Victoria Open Day – World Public Health Conference 2017

Gippsland Women's Health

- Newsletters and e-news, website

Partner Websites and Social Media

- CVM installation press release posted on BCSC, WSC and BBSC
- Location of the machines is promoted BCSC

Discussion

The condom vending machine initiative has successfully increased access to condoms in the towns where they have been installed. The most successful model has been councils' stocking and maintaining the machines as these machines are checked regularly and council staff have dealt with any issues with the machine quickly and easily. The machines that are managed by community groups have been effective as they have improved access to condoms but the volunteers do not tend to check the machines as regularly so any issues tend to be unresolved for a period of time which tends to lead to community frustration and vandalism. A good compromise is the machine being managed by a volunteer overseen by a health service which is being used by South Gippsland Shire Council. The uptake of the machines by sporting clubs has been limited possibly due to the perception of club members and fear that they will be seen to be promoting sex. It is often difficult to get sales data as the clubs' focus is on the sport and they do not prioritise providing data. In fact one club is going to return their machine as they no longer have a senior team so the club rooms are only used sporadically.

The project has been a great way to get sexual health on councils' agenda and in the municipal and public health and wellbeing plans. Bass Coast Shire Council as the first council was instrumental in developing the ongoing approach for the condom vending machine initiative. To make the condoms accessible for all genders as well as people with a disability- the accessible toilets were chosen where available. This also increased the privacy for people using the machines. Braille signage was installed on the outside of the toilet where the CVM was installed as well as on the machine. This model was replicated in other council areas.

The first condoms that were provided by the condom vending machine supplier were a ribbed variety Rough riders and the packaging had a sexist image. The vending machine company advised that this was the variety supplied by Ansell. GWH followed up with Ansell that replaced the condoms and requested input from GWH and BCSC on the design of condom packs. Ansell also provided condoms for schoolies.



Figure 6: Sexist imaging on original condom packaging

Future work/Recommendations

The Condom Vending Machine project has been implemented since mid- 2014 and the sustainability of the project needs to be addressed. This will be achieved through:

- Providing councils, health services and community group with the balance of the funds for the purchase of 1000 free condoms per machine.
- Contacting Gippsland Councils that are not participating in the project and those that have less than 6 machines to advise that the funding for the project will be directed to other sexual and reproductive health priorities by June 2019 if they do not have the capacity to be involved in the project.

The focus of the project will move to promoting the location of the machines and expanding the Are You Covered campaign to include messages about STI testing. Young people will be consulted to evaluate the effectiveness of the marketing campaign as well as strategies to overcome vandalism.

References

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Victorian Women's Health Atlas

<http://victorianwomenshealthatlas.net.au/#/>