



Holding Hands, Hoxton Square, STIK 2020

Sexually Healthy

Working hand in hand to improve the sexual and reproductive health of young people in the City of London and Hackney

Annual report of the Director of Public Health for the City of London and the London Borough of Hackney

Summary 2023/24

The full report can be viewed at cityhackneyhealth.org.uk.

For further information please contact public.health@hackney.gov.uk.



Sexually Healthy

Sex is a vital part of life, and people's sexuality is an important source of pleasure and wellbeing.

This year's Director of Public Health's annual report is about the sexual and reproductive health of people in Hackney and the City of London. It is about making sure we have the right information, support and services available so we can enjoy enriching and pleasurable relationships, choosing when and if to have sex, when and if to get pregnant.

There are, of course, certain risks to do with sex. In fact, there are significant concerns around sexual health in our part of London and these are described in the report. For example, Hackney and the City have extremely high rates of **sexually transmitted infections** and this is a particular focus of the report.

The report provides an overview of the situation in Hackney and the City but looks more closely at issues relating to younger people. We know that people under 30 use sexual health services more often than others. We know younger people are more likely to have sexually transmitted infections. The report explores how we can improve **young people's access to sexual and reproductive health services**.

The report provides **five recommendations** to address local needs and reduce health inequalities. While the recommendations focus on young people, the principles they contain apply across sexual and reproductive health. These must also inform work with other specific groups and communities. The first recommendation is about ensuring real collaboration with local communities. It is the most important recommendation because it determines how to approach all the others.



Sexually transmitted infections

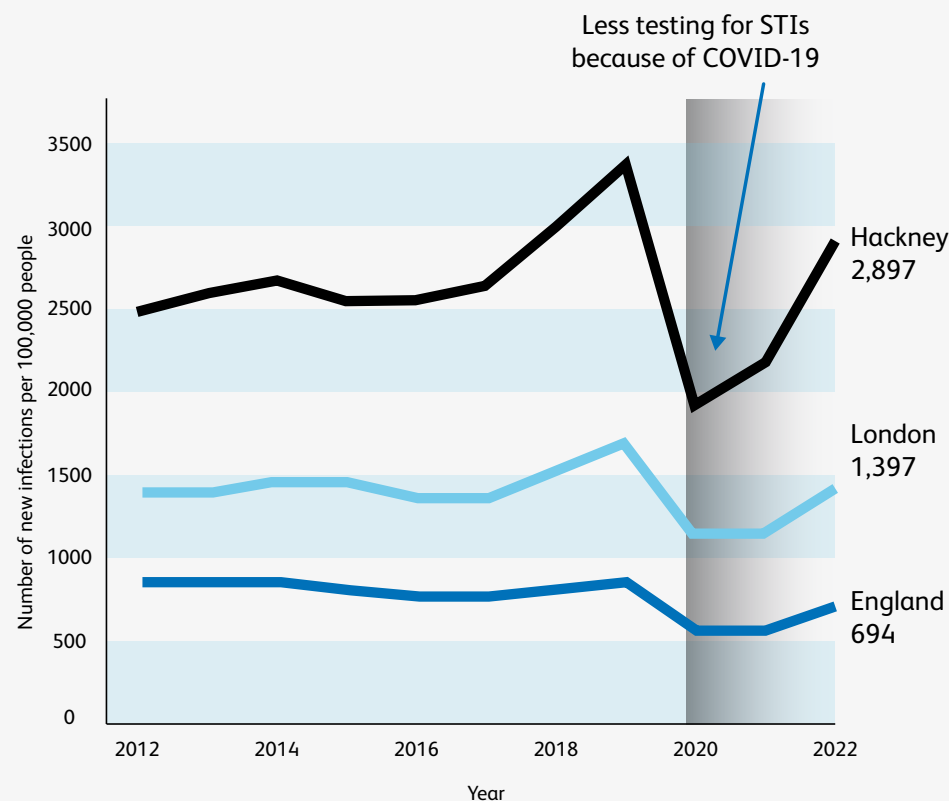
The number of sexually transmitted infections diagnosed in Hackney and the City each year is extremely high (see Figure 1). These infections can be treated and managed but the earlier they are diagnosed the better.

Early diagnosis means fewer health complications for individuals, less chance of other people being infected, and cheaper, more effective, treatment. Unfortunately, we are not testing for these infections as much now as we did before the COVID-19 pandemic and this is contributing to the ongoing high rates in the community.

Ensuring prompt diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted infections, as well as notification of sexual partners who may be at risk, is a fundamental principal of effective sexual and reproductive health services. It is an area where further improvements can, and must, be made.

New diagnoses of sexually transmitted infections

Figure 1: Sexually transmitted infections by area of residence



In 2022, the rate of new diagnoses of sexually transmitted infections in Hackney was more than double the average rate for London and more than four times the average rate for England. Hackney had the fourth highest rate of new infections out of all the 150 local authorities in England.

The rate of new sexually transmitted infections in the City of London was even higher, indeed the highest in England (3,655 per 100,000). We have not, however, included these figures in the chart because the number of residents in the City is relatively small compared to other areas. The 2022 data for both the City of London and Hackney can be viewed [here](#).

Improving young people's access to sexual and reproductive health services

One important way to improve the sexual and reproductive health of people living in Hackney and the City is to make sure they have easy access to sexual and reproductive health services.

There are two aspects to this: first, we need to make sure that our services are the best they can be; and second, we need to make sure people are aware of the services and feel comfortable using them. People need to know where they can go for help when they don't feel right, when things go wrong, or when they just need advice.

The report examines the challenges facing young people and provides recommendations for how we can improve access to sexual and reproductive health services. In this way, we also throw light on wider issues affecting sexual and reproductive health in Hackney and the City and propose general principles to guide future work.



Broome and Lafayette, LA2 and STIK 2016



Keith's Garage, Bentley Road, 2008

Recommendations

The five recommendations made in the report will enhance sexual and reproductive wellbeing. They are addressed to the people and organisations that provide sexual and reproductive health services and those that fund them, as well as the communities and individuals who use those services. The report emphasises the importance of everyone working together - putting collaboration at the centre of our strategies.

Work hand in hand with communities...

- 1. Community involvement is essential to providing high quality services:** we need the people who provide services, and the people who fund them, to work more closely with the communities they serve. People need to work together to design services, to increase people's awareness of those services, and to improve attitudes to sex and sexual health in our communities. This is the most important recommendation in the report because it determines how to approach all the others.

to help people, especially younger people, access services when they need them...

- 2. Services must be easily accessible to young people:** refine existing sexual and reproductive health services and explore new initiatives in collaboration with young people to make accessing services as easy as possible.
- 3. Young people must be aware of when and how to access support:** improve young people's awareness of services and their willingness to access them. Relationship and sex education in schools and colleges is essential but we need to go further so that we can have sex positive conversations throughout our communities.

with everyone collaborating to improve those services despite financial and staffing pressures...

- 4. Focus on enhancing collaboration and partnership working:** continue to develop collaborative working practices across sexual and reproductive health services and beyond, in order to mitigate pressures on services and improve user experiences.

never forgetting to identify and combat inequalities.

- 5. Continue to identify and address inequalities in sexual and reproductive health:** we need ongoing research and audit, undertaken in collaboration with communities, to identify inequalities, with findings communicated to all concerned partners. Efforts to enhance research and audit activities must be coupled with a commitment to address those inequalities that are identified. Focus on enhancing collaboration and partnership working: continue to develop collaborative working practices across SRH and beyond to mitigate pressures on services and improve user experiences.

Key messages

Public health is concerned with health creation – our approach must be community based and participatory. We need to find a shared purpose with the communities we serve and be guided by meaningful collaboration and a desire for the true co-production of services.

We need to recognise how important sexual and reproductive health is to our entire population. Sexual and reproductive health goes beyond the presence or absence of an infection. It involves choice, consent, pleasure, and good relationships. The World Health Organisation describes sexual health as “fundamental to the overall health and well-being of individuals, couples and families”. It is fundamental to the wellbeing of our communities.

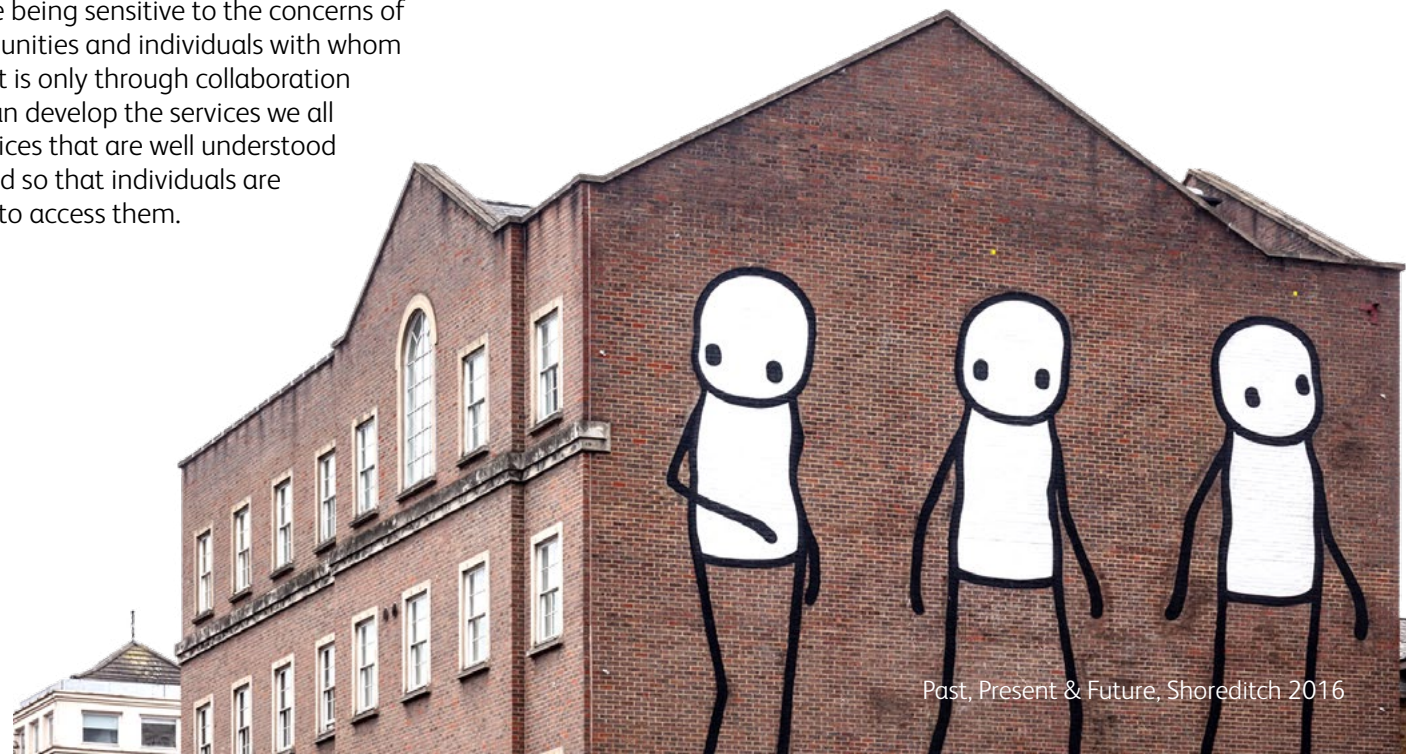
We must support every individual’s right to enjoy a fulfilling sexual life and loving relationships. We need to empower people and foster their sense of control. People have sex for lots of different reasons but they should always be able to choose whether or not to have sex, free from coercion or violence; choose whether to get pregnant; and know what to do and where to go if they have problems.

We must adopt a sex-positive approach that is “open, frank and positive about sex, that challenges negative societal attitudes to sex and that emphasises sexual diversity at the same time as emphasising the importance of consent”. [\(Pound & Campbell, 2017\)](#)

Issues related to sexual and reproductive health are deeply linked to our individual identities and cultures; and this is why it so important that we work together with communities. We need to normalise conversations about sex – so people feel comfortable asking for help – while at the same time being sensitive to the concerns of the communities and individuals with whom we work. It is only through collaboration that we can develop the services we all need: services that are well understood and trusted so that individuals are confident to access them.

We want to have the best sexual and reproductive health services possible.

Services that improve the health of our communities through promoting healthy behaviours and giving people good information; preventing ill health; treating concerns quickly and effectively; and reducing inequalities. All with the aim of promoting the enjoyment of rich and fulfilling lives. We must remember that “high-quality sexual health services are the cornerstone of ensuring good population health.” [\(BASHH, 2019\)](#)





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