

8 March 2024

SHQ launches groundbreaking intimate partner violence and reproductive coercion and abuse training program on International Women's Day

Sexual Health Quarters announces a new intimate partner violence and reproductive coercion and abuse eLearning resource designed to improve the capacity of healthcare workers to provide holistic support to people experiencing violence.

The eLearning package is designed to provide participants with a framework for responding and referring clients experiencing intimate partner violence (IPV) and reproductive coercion and abuse (RCA) and develop the skills and knowledge to recognise the signs of IPV/RCA and provide support in a safe environment.

The training has previously only been available to Perth Metropolitan doctors, and we are excited to open registrations to all doctors, nurses, medical students, psychologists, counsellors, social workers, allied health workers, and non-clinical support staff across Australia.

SHQ is a leading provider of professional development and clinical training with a focus on prevention and intervention programs that aim to improve sexual health and relationship wellbeing for all.

This new addition to our growing suite of capacity building programs was developed by SHQ's Safe to Tell Project team in consultation with various stakeholders, clinicians, and consumers, and with Curtin University conducting research on the effectiveness of the training, ensuring the work contributes to the growing evidence base on IPV/RCA in Australia.

IPV/RCA is a significant health issue. 41% of the Australian population aged 18 years and over have experienced violence since the age of 15, and an estimated 11.6% of the Australian population (approximately 3 million) aged 18 years and over have experienced intimate partner specific violence.

SHQ developed and successfully implemented an IPV/RCA screening tool within our organisation in 2019. The screening is now standard practice and offered to all clients attending clinic and counselling appointments. The tool has been a huge success with the client acceptance rate sitting at 99%.

In 2021, SHQ was awarded a HESTA Excellence Award in recognition of our work developing and implementing the screening tool.

The screening tool was also adapted in consultation with the SHQ Disability Reference Group, clients, clinicians and disability counsellors for the purpose of screening our disability counselling clients for abuse.

What is IPV?

Intimate partner violence (IPV) refers to any behaviour by someone in an intimate relationship (current or ex partners, cohabitating or dating relationships) that causes physical, sexual, or psychological harm to those in the relationship.

What is RCA?

Although a relatively new concept, reproductive coercion and abuse (RCA) has gained attention as a pervasive form of IPV, and increasingly a form of abuse in its own right. RCA refers to a range of behaviours that deliberately interfere with the autonomy of a person to make decisions about their reproductive health.

Typically, behaviours fall within three domains:

- Contraception sabotage – interference with birth control.
- Pregnancy coercion – forcing a person to get pregnant.
- Controlling the outcome of a pregnancy – forcing someone to terminate a wanted pregnancy or continue an unwanted pregnancy.

“Partner-based violence is a global public health and clinical problem of epidemic proportions.

“As a GP specialising in sexual and reproductive health, I know that primary care is an ideal setting for safe disclosures of violence. After family and friends, GPs are the second largest source of support for people experiencing intimate partner violence. Many people experiencing partner-based violence want the opportunity to discuss their situation and options with their healthcare provider.

“Not all providers are able to detect signs of abuse, respond appropriately, and refer clients to the right services. SHQ’s Intimate Partner Violence and Reproductive Coercion and Abuse training was created to provide professionals in primary care with a more in-depth understanding of IPV/RCA, so they are prepared to support people in their care experiencing violence and coercive abuse.

“Most people go into primary care because they want to help people, but the job can be demanding. Our decision to provide the training online, in a self-paced learning format, was made in the interest of improving accessibility. We want as many health practitioners as possible to have the opportunity to build their skills and understanding of intimate partner violence and reproductive coercion and abuse and be able to practically apply those skills in their workplace.”

Dr Samantha Johnson, Medical Director, Sexual Health Quarters

“People experiencing intimate partner violence are more likely to engage mental health, emergency department, hospital outpatient, primary care, pharmacy, and specialty services, meaning providers frequently, and often unknowingly, encounter people affected by violence.

“We are proud to have developed this innovative program to address the health impacts of intimate partner violence and reproductive coercion and abuse.

“SHQ is committed to addressing the social determinants negatively impacting people’s health and wellbeing. We provide a safe, confidential environment where people can disclose experiences of violence and receive support. By sharing this training with the wider sector, our goal is to see healthcare providers build on already established trust with patients and ensure they are giving the best care possible.

“As an early intervention strategy, SHQ’s Intimate Partner Violence and Reproductive Coercion and Abuse eLearning program aligns with The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032, the National Women’s Health Strategy 2020-2030 and Path to Safety: Western Australia’s Strategy to Reduce Family and Domestic Violence 2020 – 2030.”

Debra Barnes, Chief Executive Officer, Sexual Health Quarters

Debra and Samantha are available for further comment.

Sexual Health Quarters is the largest non-government provider of specialised sexual and reproductive health in Western Australia. We provide innovative clinical services, tailored counselling, and inspiring education that empowers people of all genders, ages, cultures and sexualities with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to make informed choices about their sexual health and relationships.