

5 November 2024

## **Thank You for Asking: Early Intervention in Practice**

*SHQ hosts breakfast seminar to celebrate the success of Safe to Tell, an Intimate Partner Violence and Reproductive Coercion and Abuse Screening Pilot Project*

On 31 October 2024, Sexual Health Quarters hosted a breakfast seminar at the Western Australian State Library to celebrate the success of our first-of-its-kind program for screening clients and patients in clinical and counselling settings and present recently published SHQ research demonstrating the need for intimate partner violence (IPV) and reproductive coercion and abuse (RCA) intervention practices in primary health.

We were grateful to have special guest, Minister for Early Childhood Education; Child Protection; Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence; Community Services Sabine Winton address attendees. She stated,

*“Community health organisations, like Sexual Health Quarters, are invaluable, they are often the first point of contact for victim-survivors seeking help. These organisations not only offer safe, trauma-informed, and culturally appropriate services but also play a critical role in preventing violence through education and early intervention.*

*“Coercive control is complex, and we really need to improve community education around what it looks like, we need to train workforces to better recognise and respond so that when victim survivors seek help, they get appropriate responses.”*

In 2018, SHQ developed and implemented IPV/RCA screening in our clinical practice.

The success of the program led the organisation to quickly begin developing Safe to Tell, a project dedicated to IPV/RCA screening implementation and training to upskill other organisations and individual clinicians in recognising, responding, and referring patients and clients with experiences of IPV/RCA. SHQ clinicians, counsellors and educators have collaborated to ensure the ongoing success of the project.

Safe to Tell Project Manager, Elizabeth Tekanyo, said during her address,

*“We know IPV and RCA are pervasive public health issues and victim-survivors want their healthcare providers to ask them about their experiences of violence. We knew we needed to get more community health clinics involved following the initial research. This entailed screening and training more GPs, counsellors, clinical and allied healthcare workers. Clinicians wanted to learn and build confidence to support their patients with experiences of violence. Healthcare providers are in the ideal position to set up referral pathways to the services that many of you lead within the FDV sector.”*

Thanks to a generous grant from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, SHQ partnered with LUMA and South Coastal Health and Community Services to pilot the screening implementation program within their services. Each program was tailored to the needs of their organisation and service users. Thanks to generous funding from the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries, IPV/RCA eLearning was also developed to build capacity among clinicians, counsellors and allied health workers looking to better support clients and patients with experiences of abuse.

Elizabeth said,

*“SHQ is well-placed as a sexual and reproductive health clinic to work and teach within the intersection between intimate partner relationships and reproductive health. GPs are ideally situated to support clients with IPV/RCA given its pervasive numbers and the fact that GPs are very regularly prescribing contraception and providing medical terminations. It was thus important they recognised signs of coercion, violence and abuse.”*

Data collected during the pilot project showed a high prevalence of IPV/RCA among the patients who attended the community health services. The study also demonstrated that any woman, regardless of age, postcode, Indigenous status, country of birth or sexuality, could be at risk of exposure to partner violence, demonstrating the need for a whole-of-organisation approach to IPV/RCA screening to ensure no one falls through the cracks.

Attendees heard from SHQ CEO, Debra Barnes, who passionately championed the Safe to Tell Project. She told the story of an SHQ client – given the pseudonym Sarah – and her experience with IPV/RCA screening in our clinic,

*“Sarah had been visiting our clinic for many years. She would come in for her routine appointments, always with her partner in the waiting room. To her doctor, everything seemed normal, and yet, for Sarah, these visits were moments of hope, or perhaps even silent calls for help. Over the years, her partner had gradually taken control of nearly every part of her life, including her reproductive choices. But Sarah, like so many others, didn’t know how to start the conversation. She needed us to ask.*

*“It was only through the development of the clinician and consumer endorsed screening tool as part of SHQ’s 2018 research project, Identifying and Responding to Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and Reproductive Coercion & Abuse (RCA), that looked at the prevalence of disclosures of IPV and/or RCA and possible links between IPV/RCA and unintended pregnancy and STIs in women that Sarah’s story surfaced.*

*“We uncovered just how many ‘Sarahs’ were coming to us regularly, not knowing how to begin the conversation, silently hoping we would ask.”*

In March 2024, SHQ launched our groundbreaking IPV/RCA eLearning resource nationally for doctors, nurses, psychologists, counsellors, and allied health workers looking to provide better support to those in their care. We opened expressions of interest for Inquiring about IPV/RCA: Whole of Practice Clinical Screening and Education at the breakfast seminar. This comprehensive training package is designed for entire healthcare practices, ensuring both clinical and non-clinical staff are equipped to recognise, respond to, and refer clients experiencing IPV/RCA.

Debra stated,

*“Training is more than just ticking the box, it’s an active step toward addressing IPV and RCA in our community, and it empowers us, as community leaders, and healthcare professionals, to offer meaningful, early intervention, and to give people like Sarah a path forward.”*

The event closed with a panel discussion. Amanda O’Donovan, SHQ Clinical Psychologist, Dr Roanna Lobo, School of Population Health at Curtin University, Felicite Black, CEO, LUMA, and Michelle Rhyder, Acting CEO, South Coastal Health and Community Services, discussed their roles in the Safe to Tell Project and the importance of early intervention programs in health settings.

**More information**

Medical Journal of Australia – [15 September 2024, Intimate partner violence and reproductive coercion: cross-sectional study of women attending a Perth sexual health clinic, 2019–20](#)

[IPV/RCA training at SHQ](#)

Media Statement – [8 March 2024, SHQ launches groundbreaking intimate partner violence and reproductive coercion and abuse training program on International Women’s Day](#)



(L-R) Elizabeth Tekanyo, Sharon Wood-Kenney, Minister Sabine Winton, Debra Barnes



(L-R) Amanda O’Donovan, Felicite Black, Dr Roanna Lobo, Michelle Rhyder, Elizabeth Tekanyo.



(L-R) Felicite Black, Dr Roanna Lobo.