



# Improving condom access and availability in Melbourne's West

12 MONTH PILOT REPORT

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# Improving condom access and availability in Melbourne's West

## Executive Summary

The provision of condom vending machines (CVM) within the western region of Melbourne aims to increase public access and availability to condoms. The CVM project aims to redress social inequities by increasing condom availability for marginalised populations who might not have access to these resources and has the potential to impact rising sexually transmissible infection (STI) and teenage fertility rates in the western region of Melbourne. In 2014, the seven local governments that comprise Melbourne's western region (Brimbank, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Melbourne, Melton, Moonee Valley and Wyndham) were invited to participate in a 12 month pilot project to assess the suitability, acceptability and use of CVM in their municipality.

The CVM pilot project took place between July 2015 and September 2016. Women's Health West signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with three local councils (Brimbank, Maribyrnong and Melton) and 10 condom vending machines were installed during this period. A total of 576 condom packs were sold across the three municipalities, equating to 1,333 condoms. Community feedback was positive and minimal vandalism was reported across the five chosen sites which included libraries, leisure centres and a public park.

Melton City Council vending machines were placed at Hannah Watts Park, Caroline Springs Leisure Centre and Melton Library and Learning Hub. Four hundred and ninety four packs (equating to 988 condoms) were sold across these sites. The period with the highest sales was January – February 2016, with an average of 2.6 packs sold per day. Brimbank City Council sales at Visy Cares Hub (Sunshine) were consistent across the pilot with an average of 10 packs sold per month. Consultation with young service users at Visy Cares Hub resulted in the subsidised costs of condoms at this location. A total of 82 condom packs were sold in the Maribyrnong municipality, with the highest sales were reported between November and December 2015. It is predicted that increased patronage during the school holidays and summer period at the Footscray Library (where machines were placed) may have influenced this.

All three councils played an active role in social marketing strategies during the pilot. Women's Health West and council partners attended numerous community events, including Victoria University O-Fest, Midsumma Festival and community forums at Brimbank Youth Services. Women's Health West and partners designed and implemented a number of social media campaigns during the pilot period with substantial community reach. The Women's Health West designed #SafeSexInTheWest campaign generated 28,575 unique impressions across both Twitter and Facebook. Other social media campaigns were informed by timely social references and events, including Pokémon Go, the AFL Grand Final and Sexual Health Awareness Week. Dating apps Squirr and Grindr (targeting men who have sex with men) were used to promote machines, generating 67,272 impressions and 129 click-throughs.

Condom vending machines have proven a successful venture for local government thus far. Women's Health West recommends the expansion of the project into other local government areas, using the pilot as a guide for comparable installation sites and anticipated suitability in the area with a strong focus on the three target populations: men who have sex with men in beats, street-based sex workers and young people. The continuation of collaborative practice between Women's Health West and partners is also recommended for the purpose of social marketing, social media campaign design and implementation, and stakeholder promotion.

## Background

The prevalence of sexually transmissible infections (STIs), such as chlamydia and gonorrhoea, as well as teenage fertility are significantly higher in the western region of Melbourne compared to other parts of the state (Department of Health & Human Services 2014 & Women's Health Victoria 2015). Using condoms and lubricant consistently and correctly can prevent the transmission of STIs (including HIV and other blood borne viruses) and unplanned pregnancies, making it a key public health and health promotion consideration (CDC 2013 & Charanbia et al. 2011). Limited publically assessable and affordable condoms still presents a fundamental barrier to condom use for young people and other population groups such as men who have sex with men and street-based sex workers.

Improving condom access and availability through condom vending machines in public places is a key strategy in Action for Equity: A Sexual and Reproductive Health Plan for Melbourne's West 2013-2017. The condom vending machine project is designed to create an enabling environment through supportive council policies that increase public access and availability to condoms. This project aims to redress social inequities by increasing condom availability for marginalised populations who might not have access to these resources due to a range of factors including finances, transport, and pervasive stigma surrounding purchasing condoms. It also aims to increase knowledge about the importance of safe sexual practice, where to access free and low cost condoms, and screening and treatment through a social marketing strategy, which includes social media.

## Process

In 2014, the seven local governments that comprise Melbourne's western region (Brimbank, Hobson's Bay, Maribyrnong, Melbourne, Melton, Moonee Valley and Wyndham) were invited to participate in a 12 month pilot project to assess the suitability, acceptability and use of condom vending machines in their municipality. Women's Health West developed business cases for the six councils that provided in-principle project support. These reports outlined municipality-specific STI and teenage fertility rates, number of local public toilets and recommendations to enable condom vending machine installation. It was proposed that a minimum of 20 per cent of council's public toilets be equipped with condom vending machines to contribute to the success of this project. Based on the numbers of public toilets identified in each municipality, the following number of machines were proposed:

Brimbank City Council	three condom vending machines
Hobson's Bay City Council	six condom vending machines
Maribyrnong City Council	two condom vending machines
Melton City Council	three condom vending machines
Moonee Valley City Council	five condom vending machines
Wyndham City Council	three condom vending machines

FIGURE 1: RECOMMENDED CONDOM VENDING MACHINES PER MUNICIPALITY, PRESENTED IN BUSINESS CASES

Business cases informed the development of internal proposals for managers and executives, which were delivered by council staff. The suitability of the project and locations for installation was ultimately determined by council.

## Partnership agreement

Women's Health West drafted memorandum of understanding (MoU) that outlined the partnership agreement with participating councils and emphasised the commitment to collaborative practice, particularly for the design and implementation of social marketing strategies to promote the condom vending machine locations. MoUs also outlined the participation in quarterly working group meetings. The purpose of the working group meetings was to share council-specific updates, social marketing ideas and other key events that might be relevant to the project. Representatives from each of the seven councils were invited to attend the meetings, even if their council was not involved in the pilot phase. In addition to these meetings, regular correspondence between Women's Health West and council staff from the councils piloting the machines (emails, face-to-face meetings) ensured that project deliverables were actioned in a timely manner.

## Results

The pilot project took place between July 2015 and September 2016; three local councils (Brimbank, Maribyrnong and Melton) signed MoUs with Women's Health West and a total of 10 condom vending machines were installed. Two councils (Brimbank and Melton) opted for a rental model of installation, while Maribyrnong implemented a purchase model. A representative from Powder Room Cosmetics serviced the rented machines every six weeks, while purchased machines were the responsibility of council staff. Installation sites included libraries, youth services, leisure centres and public parks. Over the duration of the pilot, Women's Health West worked collaboratively with project partners to design and implement social marketing strategies to promote the condom vending machines to target population groups. Women's Health West collated the sales data, which was shared with partners via the Action for Equity online resource hub. Installation and location details are outlined in Figure 2.

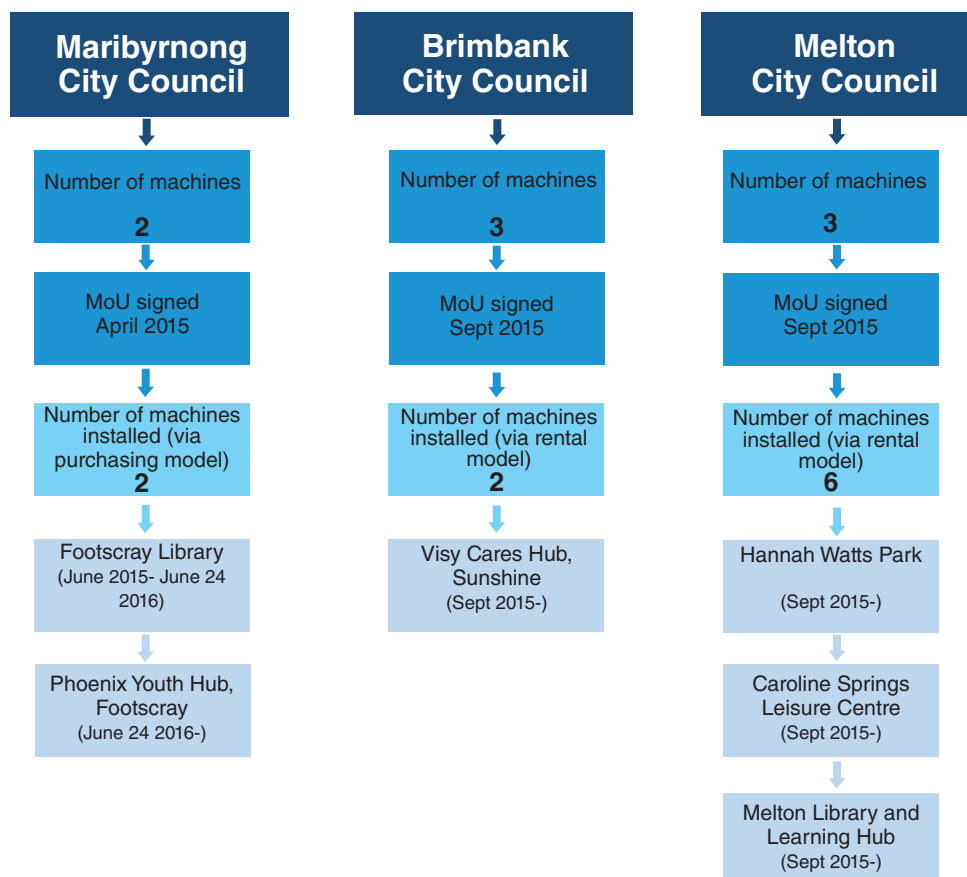


FIGURE 2: CONDOM VENDING MACHINE INSTALLATION DURING PILOT PERIOD

During the pilot, Women's Health West convened four regional working group meetings. As per the MoU agreement, all three pilot participants were in attendance at each meeting.

## Maribyrnong City Council

Maribyrnong City Council (Health and Wellbeing team) and Women's Health West signed a MoU for the project in April 2015, and two machines were jointly purchased and installed at Footscray Library in July 2015. Condom vending machines were initially intended for installation at Phoenix Youth Hub (also located in Footscray) but this was postponed until June 2016 to coincide with the reopening of the hub after renovations. As these machines fell under a purchase model Footscray Library staff, with guidance from Maribyrnong City Council's Health and Wellbeing team, were responsible for the restocking and maintenance of the machines, as well as forwarding sales data to Women's Health West on a monthly basis for collation. Condom packs were priced at two for \$1.

During the pilot period, Maribyrnong City Council played an active role in the promotion of the machines through community events, social media promotion and internal council promotion. Maribyrnong City Council's communications team worked closely with the Health and Wellbeing team to ensure that content was posted on council's social media platforms. Women's Health West and Maribyrnong City Council attended Victoria University's O-Fest in February 2016 to promote the machines to new and returning students at the Footscray campus. Women's Health West also presented on the project at the Maribyrnong Youth Advisory Network (MYAN) meeting in April 2015 to an audience of service providers and council staff. Further participation in social marketing initiatives are outlined on page 9.

A total of 82 condom packs (equating to 164 condoms) were sold between July 2015 and July 2016. Of these, 65 (79 per cent) were purchased from the male restrooms and 17 (21 per cent) from the female restrooms. Sales rose by 171 per cent between July and December 2015, and then averaged five packs sold per month for the remainder of the pilot. The highest sales were reported between November and December 2015. It is predicted that increased patronage during the school holidays and summer period may have influenced this. There were no reports of damage or vandalism to the machines during the pilot, and no negative feedback from the community.

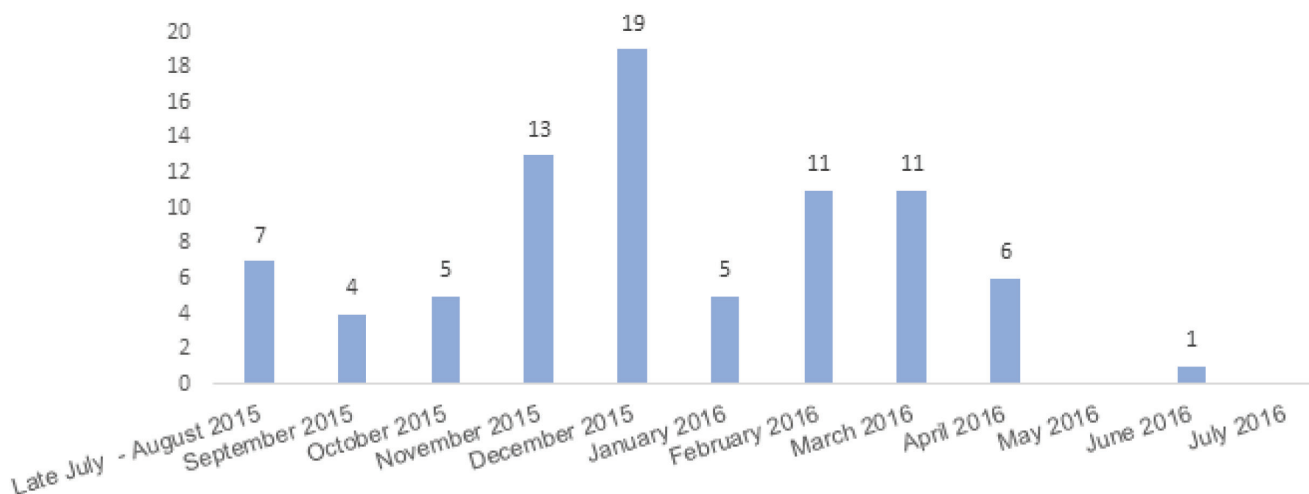


FIGURE 3: CONDOM SALES (PACKS), MARIBYRNONG

## Brimbank City Council

Brimbank City Council (Health and Wellbeing team) and Women's Health West signed a project MoU in September 2015, and two machines were rented and installed at Visy Cares Hub, Sunshine in the same month. The hub opened in 2007 and aims to maximize the positive opportunities for young people, aged from 12 to 25 years of age in Sunshine and the western suburbs of Melbourne, by co-locating a range of services and programs in the same building<sup>1</sup>, which include Brimbank Youth Services. Consultation with 89 young service users at the hub indicated that the machines would be well received and used by the community, especially if condoms were low cost and in a discrete

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.visycares.org/projects\\_sunshine.htm](http://www.visycares.org/projects_sunshine.htm) (accessed 6/10/16)

location. Based on this feedback, Brimbank City Council subsidised the cost of the condoms to 20c each or three for \$1. The machines fell under a rental model, with maintenance and restocking completed by Powder Room Cosmetics every six weeks.

Sales at these machines were stable during the 12 month period and a total of 117 packs were sold, equating to approximately 10 packs per month on average. Single packs were favoured (72.6 per cent) and the majority of sales took place in the male restrooms (76.1 per cent). Similar to Maribyrnong, the first rise in sales data corresponded with summer, while the second coincided with the launch of the #SafeSexInTheWest social media campaign, of which there was local media interest from the Brimbank Leader newspaper. Brimbank City Council actively promoted the project within the Visy Cares Hub, placing flyers and posters throughout the building. Women’s Health West Project Coordinator also spoke at a Brimbank Youth Services’ event relating to alcohol and drug use on 20 April 2016 to an audience of 40 secondary school students. In August 2016, prior to the pilot concluding, Brimbank Council purchased the two rented machines and also purchased an additional two machines for installation in the other Visy Care’s Hub restrooms (due for installation in October 2016). This demonstrates acceptability by service users and long-term commitment to the project.

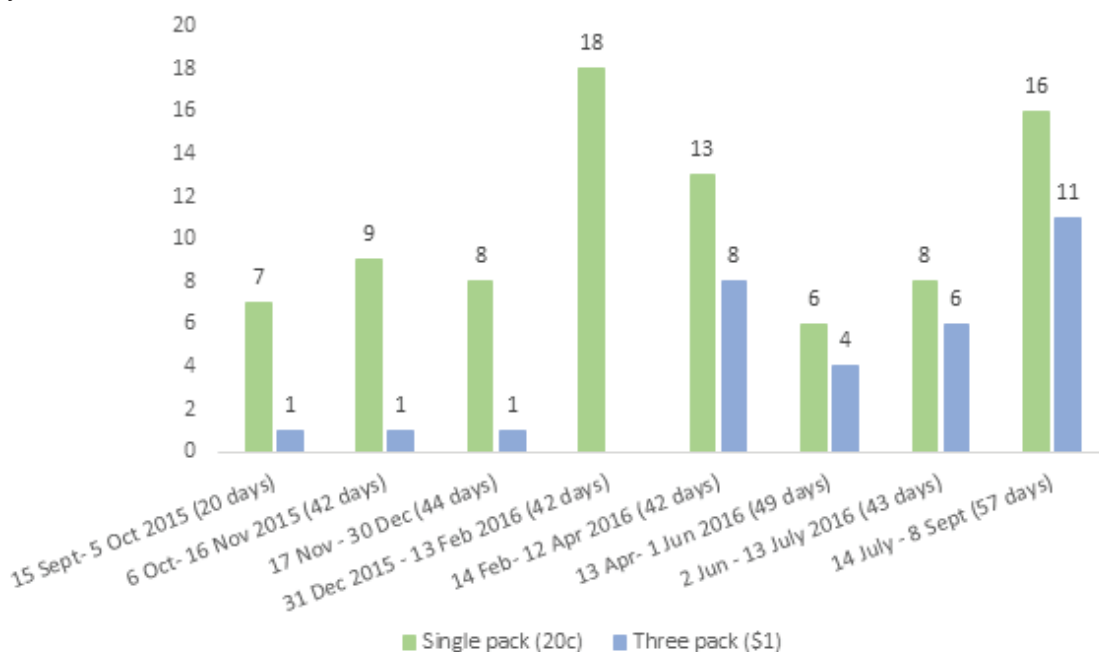


FIGURE 4: CONDOM SALES (PACKS), BRIMBANK

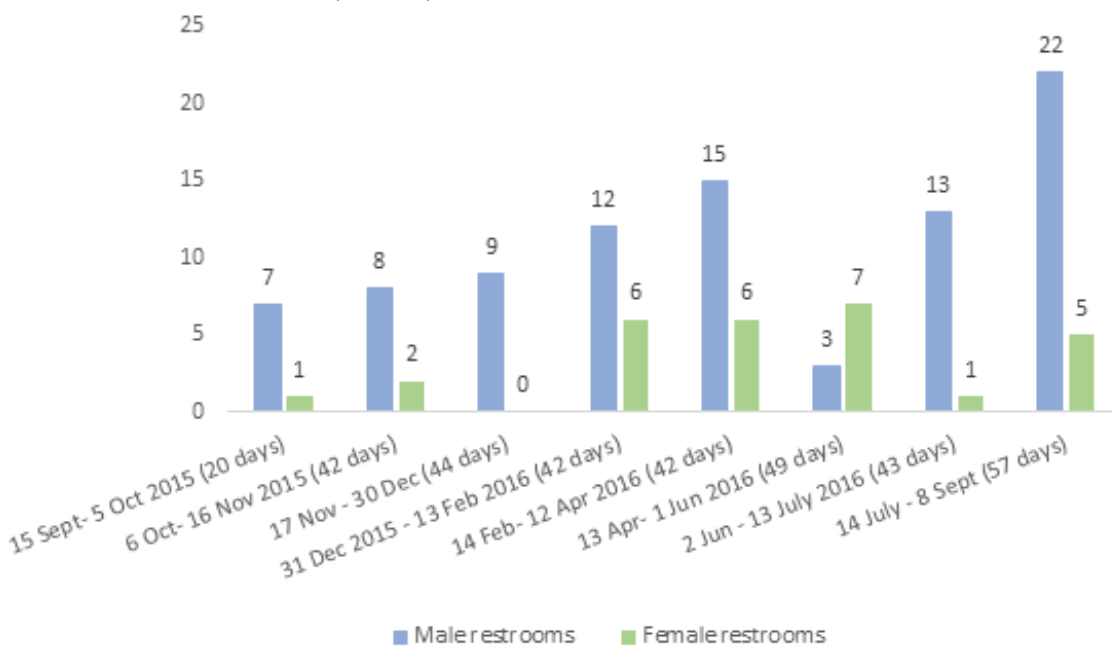


FIGURE 5: BRIMBANK CONDOM SALES (PACKS), BY RESTROOM

## Melton City Council

Melton City Council (Health Promotion and Planning team) and Women's Health West signed an MoU for the project in September 2015, and six machines were rented and installed at Hannah Watts Park (Melton), Melton Library and Learning Hub and Caroline Springs Leisure Centre (two per site). As these machines fell under a rental model, maintenance and restocking was completed by Powder Room Cosmetics every six weeks.

A total of 494 condom packs (equating to 988 condoms) were sold between September 2015 and September 2016. Of these, 302 packs (61.1 per cent) were purchased from the male restrooms and 192 (38.9 per cent) from the female restrooms. This is a smaller disparity than the other two sites. The location with the most sales was Caroline Springs Leisure Centre, with a total of 209 packs sold. This location hosts a suite of sporting facilities including courts for basketball, netball, and volleyball, fitness programs, football ovals and a skate park. Hannah Watts Park proved a successful location, with sales in excess of 160 packs. However, the machine located in the male restroom was stolen and excluded from sales figures between April and July 2016. It is anticipated that sales at this site would be significantly higher if this machine was in operation for the entire pilot. The period with the highest sales was January – February 2016, with an average of 2.6 packs sold per day.

During the pilot, there was one report of vandalism to the machine in the male restrooms at Hannah Watts Park, and the same machine was subsequently stolen in April 2016 (replaced in July 2016). Feedback from the community was generally positive during this time, with one report of negative feedback from a community member relating to the Melton Library and Learning Hub location.

Melton City Council's Health Promotion and Planning team actively promoted the condom vending machines both externally and internally, distributing flyers to a range of other council teams and services including social planning, libraries and leisure centres, communications and men's health. Flyers were also shared with secondary school nurses. Further participation in social marketing initiatives are outlined on page 9.

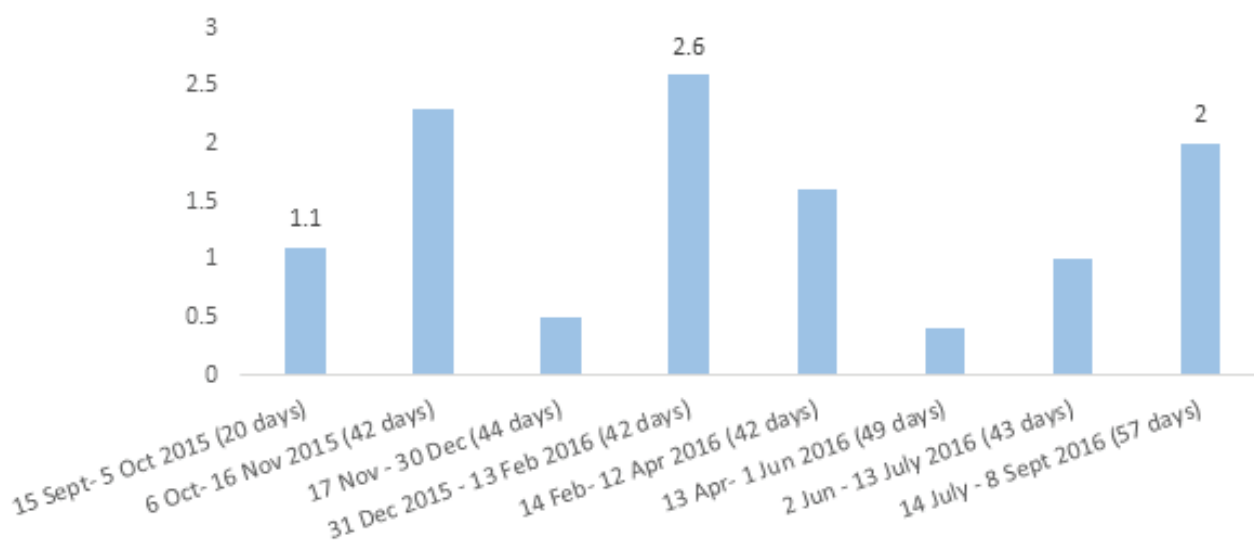


FIGURE 6: MELTON AVERAGE SALES PER DAY (PACKS)



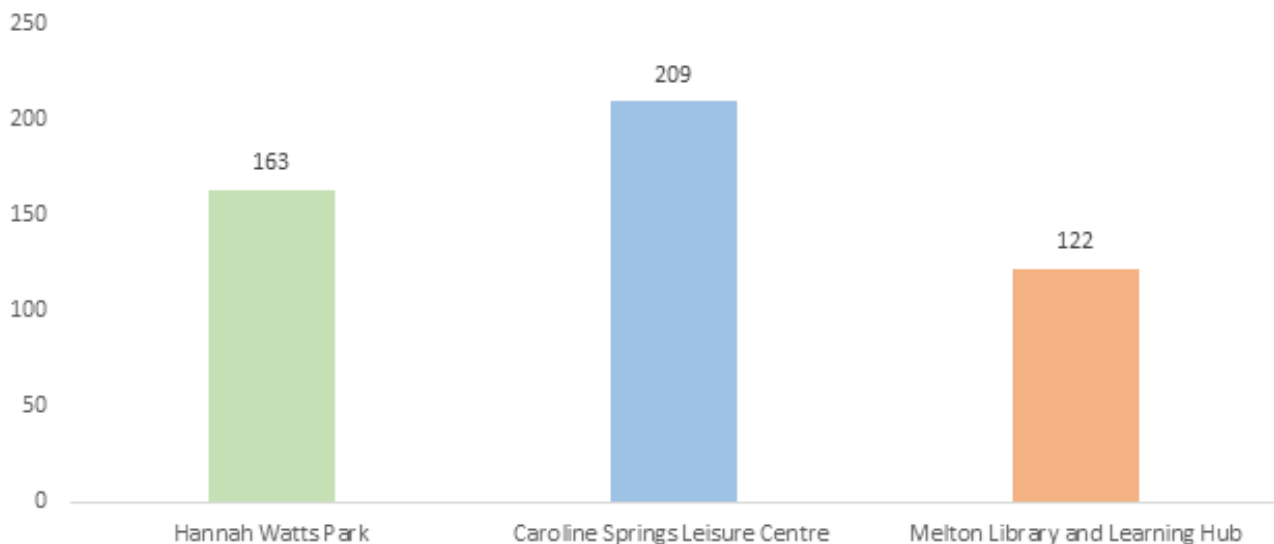


FIGURE 7: MELTON CONDOM SALES (PACKS), BY SITE

## Social marketing

A variety of social marketing activities took place at both a local and regional level during the 12 month pilot. Women’s Health West, in collaboration with the three councils involved in the pilot, initiated a number of social media campaigns. A range of community events were also attended. Key to the success of these marketing initiatives was the collaborative, regional approach to content design and promotion. Each of these three councils played an active role in the wide reach and success of these campaigns.

## Social media

### Sexual Health Awareness Week – February 2016

Sexual Health Awareness Week (SHAW) took place between 14 and 21 February 2016. A social media campaign was designed and centred on four key themes of respect, consent, choice, and pleasure. Posts were designed to engage with social media users and increase knowledge and awareness of the condom vending machines, and topics that include consent, STIs and sexual identity. During this campaign, Women’s Health West posted 16 items on Facebook and 12 on Twitter, and project partners were also encouraged to share these posts. Results of the campaign were positive. Posts had a total reach of 14,068 on Facebook alone, and across both Twitter and Facebook the campaign generated 28,575 impressions. These posts resulted in 235 click-throughs to Women’s Health West’s website, YouTube clips and other supporter’s websites. Posts were shared/retweeted 53 times by partners, supporters and other services, and 34 media outlets were exposed to the content.

### National Condom Day – February 2016

National Condom Day on 14 February 2016 was the first event to be acknowledged during SHAW. Women’s Health West designed a National Condom Day digital poster which was shared on both Facebook and Twitter. The poster highlighted the locations for free condoms and condom vending machines and also encouraged people to join the conversation using the campaign hashtag #SafeSexInTheWest. This post was subsequently shared by Healthy City of Melton, Moonee Valley Youth Services, Phoenix Youth and Sexual Health Society of Victoria. This post had the potential to reach over 3,200 users via Facebook alone.

## Pokémon Go – August 2016

At the height of the popularity of Pokémon Go (GPS and app-based mobile phone game), it was discovered that many of the condom vending machines sites (e.g. parks, libraries) were also high-traffic Pokémon Go spots. Women’s Health West produced and shared a post on Facebook, which was a play on the Pokémon catch phrase (Gotta Catch ‘Em All) and STIs. It was subsequently shared by seven others, including Phoenix Youth and Melton Youth Services. Alongside this, Women’s Health West also developed Melton and Maribyrnong-specific posts relating to Pokémon Go, to be shared by councils on social media. One such post relating to the Hannah Watts Park location was shared on Facebook by Healthy City of Melton to a potential audience of 1,122 people. A comprehensive overview of social media content can viewed in Appendix A.

## Media coverage

Media coverage relating to the condom vending machines is outlined in Table 1.

TABLE 1: MEDIA COVERAGE DURING 12 MONTH PILOT

Source	Article summary	Date	Audience reach <sup>1</sup>
<b>Maribyrnong Leader</b> (print and online, Bridie Byrne)	<i>‘Condom vending machines installed at Footscray library’</i> outlined the importance of the availability of condoms in public spaces and the influence STIs and unplanned pregnancy rates in the local area	22 Jun 2015	28,000
<b>Cosmopolitan Magazine Australia</b> (online, unknown author)	<i>‘Wowzers, Footscray Public Library has installed condom machines’</i> relating to the installation of condom vending machines in the Library	23 Jun 2015	298,000
<b>Cosmopolitan USA</b> (online, Tess Koman)	<i>‘There Are Condom Vending Machines in Public Libraries Now’</i> relating to the installation of condom vending machines in the Footscray Library	22 Jun 2015	14,772,000
<b>COED USA</b> (online, Alexa Lyons)	<i>‘Condom Vending Machine Installed in Australian Library’</i> relating to the installation of condom vending machines in the Footscray Library	22 Jun 2015	6,000,000
<b>Glamour Magazine USA</b> (online, Jillian Kramer)	<i>‘Australia Is Adding Condom Vending Machines in Public Libraries’</i> relating to the installation of condom vending machines in the Footscray Library	24 Jun 2015	8,697,000
<b>Bustle USA</b> (online, Maya M)	<i>‘This Condom Vending Machine In An Australian Library Will Make All Your Safe Sex Dreams Come True’</i> relating to the installation of condom vending machines in the Footscray Library	24 Jun 2015	50,000,000
<b>Brimbank Leader</b> (print and online, Alesha Capone)	<i>‘Focus on Sexual Health’</i> highlighted SHAW and #SafeSexInTheWest	9 Feb 2016	67,000
<b>Brimbank Leader</b> (print and online, Alesha Capone). Also published in: Melton Leader Hobson’s Bay Leader Maribyrnong Leader	<i>‘Syphilis rates up in Outer Suburbs’</i> featured a commentary from Women’s Health West Project Coordinator on rising STI rates and how condom vending machines and comprehensive sex education in schools played an important part in delivering the ‘safe sex’ message.	22 Mar 2016	161,000 total

<sup>1</sup>Newspaper figures do not include online views and are likely an underestimate.

## Other social marketing Community events

In January 2016, condom vending machine flyers were distributed to young women attending Women's Health West's Lead on Again program. On 17 January 2016, Hobsons Bay City Council distributed 100 condom vending machine flyers at the GO West stand at Midsumma Carnival, a one-day community event for the LGBTIQ community. Flyers were also displayed at other events during Midsumma Festival, including a film screening and Q & A at Footscray Library.

On 26 February 2016, Women's Health West, Maribyrnong City Council and Youth Empowerment Against HIV (YEAH) attended Victoria University O-Fest to promote condom vending machines to students attending the Footscray Campus. Over 300 flyers were distributed on the day. Responses from students was overwhelmingly positive and staff attending were also able to engage with welfare staff, staff from other organisations and student unions, with the latter promoting the project to members (Victoria University LGBTIQ+ Student Union). Maribyrnong City Council featured this event on their Facebook page, posting pictures of staff and the stall set up.

Flyers were distributed to other Women's Health West partners, including cohealth and ISIS Primary Care. Maribyrnong City Council distributed over 150 flyers to various community sites within their municipality, including leisure centres and libraries. Similarly, flyers were disseminated to a range of different service providers in Melton via the Melton Youth Advisory Network (MYAN). These services include Centerlink, local secondary schools and TAFES.

In May 2016, the bi-annual Human Relations program, a five-week program relating to sexual health and wellbeing, took place at the Western English Language School in Braybrook. Facilitators of both the men's (Phoenix Youth Services) and women's (Women's Health West) group provided condom vending machine flyers to students and teachers.

A local youth-friendly clinic in Sunshine (Brimbank municipality) have placed flyers and posters in their clinic, specifically in the section of the clinic that is accessed by young people for drop-in sexual health services on Wednesday evenings.

## Youth Services

Melton, Maribyrnong (Phoenix Youth), Brimbank, Moonee Valley and Hobsons Bay Youth services have all actively promoted the condom vending machines on site or through their networks. Melton Youth Services has placed posters and flyers in the main areas of their Melton and Taylor's Hill sites, as have Brimbank at the Visy Care's Hub and Maribyrnong at the Phoenix Youth Hub. Moonee Valley Youth Services distributed flyers at the annual Moonee Valley festival and Hobsons Bay Youth Services have displayed a large poster in their waiting room. Maribyrnong and Moonee Valley Youth Services promoted the condom vending machines to attendees of the Mad Hatters Tea Party (part of Midsumma Festival). This event targeted same sex attracted and gender diverse young people in Melbourne's west.

Women's Health West Project Coordinator presented on the project at Maribyrnong and Melton Youth Advisory Network Meetings in April and August 2016, respectively. On April 20 2016, Women's Health West Project Coordinator delivered a presentation to approximately 40 secondary school students at a Brimbank Youth Services' event relating to alcohol and drug use. This presentation focused on the relationship between substance use and sexual risk, and the condom vending machines were promoted at the end of the presentation. Student showbags also included condom vending machine flyers.

## Promotion on apps

Between 10 and 27 June 2016, advertisements were placed on two dating apps targeting gay and bisexual identifying men: Squirt and Grindr. Users were geotargeted based on suburb. These click-through ads directed users to a landing page on Women's Health West's website that listed the prices and locations of the condom vending machines. Despite a small budget, these ads generated promising reach. Overall, a total of 251 click-throughs were reported; 122 of which were

via Grindr. Squirt ads were able to generate 67,272 impressions, resulting in 129 click-throughs. During the app campaign period, condom sales rose in Melton by 126 per cent. While we cannot determine causality with these sales, it is likely that the ads helped to generate awareness.

## Conclusions and recommendations

Condom vending machines have proven a successful venture for local government with steady sales, effective social marketing initiatives and minimal vandalism. Informed by this mid-project evaluation, Women's Health West recommends the following going forward:

- 1) Expansion of the project into other local government areas, using the pilot as a guide for comparable installation sites and anticipated suitability in the area with a strong focus on the three target populations: men who have sex with men in beats, street-based sex workers and young people
- 2) Continued collaborative practice between partners and Women's Health West on social marketing initiatives across the region and within specific local government areas
- 3) Continue to promote vending machines to service patrons, including flyers, posters and content on social media/web pages
- 4) Disseminate promotional materials internally to other teams and to networks who may work with the three target populations
- 5) Further investment in advertising, including via dating apps which target men who have sex with men and heterosexual populations
- 6) Identify other ways to promote machines to men who have sex with men, potentially via outreach providers and gay men's health services
- 7) Explore ways to reach street-based sex worker communities in the west for consultation on the project (e.g. suitability, location) and machine promotion

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