



gmi

GMI Biennial Report

19
21

Content

Acknowledgement	01
Message from the GMI Steering Group	02
List of Abbreviations	04
GMI Overview	05
Advocacy and Communication	07
Community Health Programmes	08
Partnership Development and Growth	11
Research	13
HIV Prevention	15
Post COVID-19	19

Acknowledgments

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A special thank you to the GMI Steering and Executive Groups who provided leadership and guidance over the last two years, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

To the Outreach Team including the volunteers and sessionals who have given tirelessly, and in the case of the volunteers freely of their time, we are especially thankful.

We are deeply grateful to our funders – London Councils through the London HIV Prevention Programme, Fast Track Cities, Elton John AIDS Foundation, City Bridge Trust and HIV Prevention England– our collaborators, Barts NHS Trust, Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust/Freedoms, Doctors of the World UK, The Love Tank CIC, and the venues and local authorities who have facilitated our work by providing space for our Outreach Team to conduct testing, condom and lube distribution and the provision of health prevention information.



Barts Health
NHS Trust

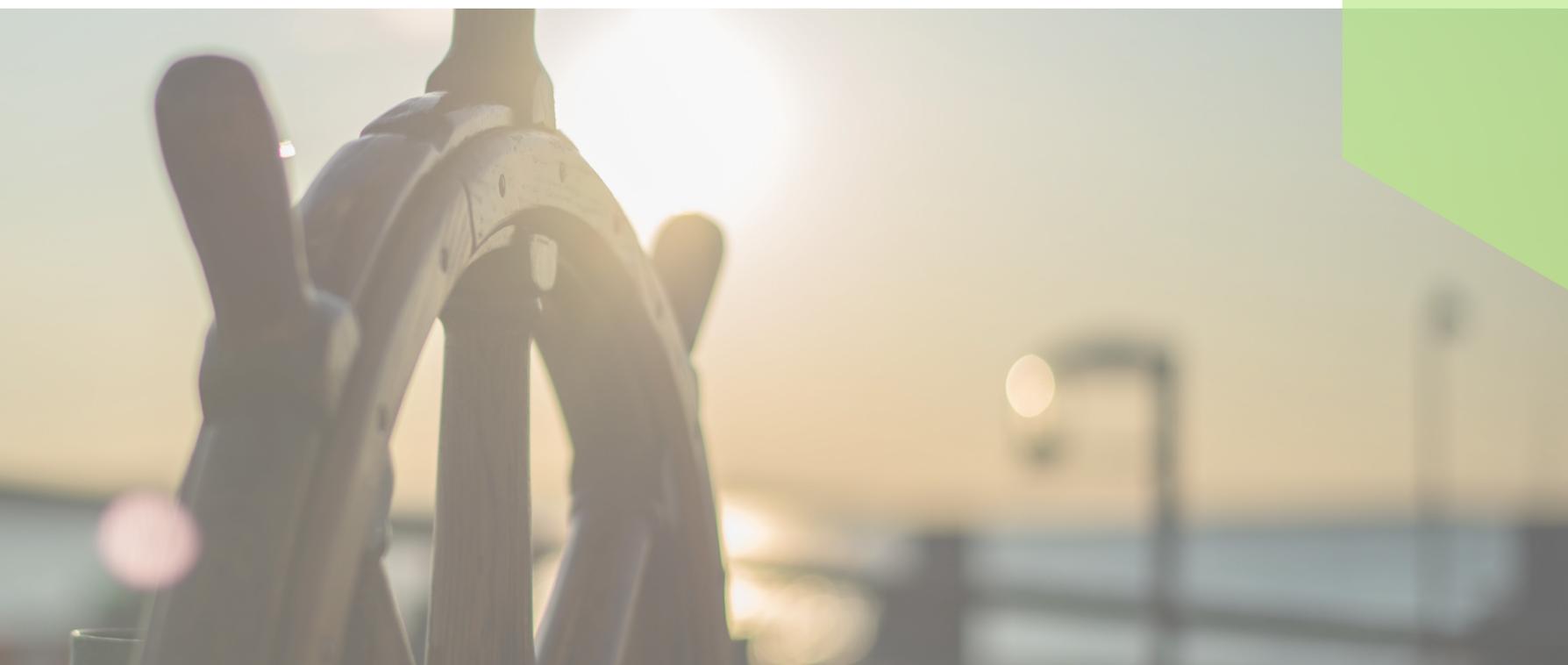


**THANK
YOU**



Message from

GMI Steering Group



Key message

We are pleased to welcome you to the GMI Partnership's Biennial Report 2019-2021. Following the celebrations of our 10-year partnership in 2018, the Partnership continued growing as a collaborative and respected alliance. In 2019, the Partnership worked to capture the essence of who we are, and aspire to be, through updating our vision, mission and values, which now shapes what we will do for years to come.



At the start of 2020, GMI was successfully funded to work collectively with Doctors of the World UK to deliver community HIV testing with migrants through our Fast-Track Cities project, giving us the added opportunity to purchase our very first mobile testing bus. The GMI testing bus has ensured we place people at the centre of our practice as we take services to the heart of the community and visit every London borough.

However 2020-2021 were exceptional years due to COVID-19, with full or partial lockdowns imposed across the UK. Like many during this time, the team worked tirelessly to diversify our

services to be accessed online or created alternative solutions to support our aims and objectives. The pandemic taught GMI many new skills and abilities as we learned to work together online and connect with our service users. We are proud of the flexibility of the staff to come up with new and innovative ways of working in this period. However, this period has also highlighted the health inequalities faced by a number of communities we work with. Issues we were presented with included digital exclusion, isolation, stigma, domestic violence, increased substance misuse and mental health issues. Certain barriers to health and wellbeing were further exasperated, including xenophobia, racism, homophobia and transphobia.

In 2020, with many national COVID-19 control measures, it was believed that such restrictions may impact people's sexual health and wellbeing, as well as other aspects of health. In order to be capable of supporting our communities during and after the pandemic, GMI and partners conducted two surveys, in April and November, and a literature review exploring people's sex life and activities, changes in sexual behaviours and use of sexual health services. The findings from these studies were shared at the [5th Joint BHIVA/BASHH Digital Conference](#) in April 2021, together with a literature review of community-based behavioural change HIV prevention approaches.

For the future, we will continue to challenge the inequities we see in sexual healthcare and work with service users, benefactors and stakeholders to ensure that the projects we deliver achieve the best outcomes for service users as defined by them.



List of Abbreviations

BASHH	British Association for Sexual Health and HIV
BASK	Behaviour Attitudes Skills Knowledge
BHIVA	British HIV Association
BME	Black Minority Ethnic
CBT	City Bridge Trust
CBWG	Capacity Building Working Group
CCHT	Community HIV Testing Pilot
CNWL	Central and North West London Foundation Trust
CORE	Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation
DOB	Date of Birth
EJAF	Elton John AIDS Foundation
eLH	e-Learning for Healthcare (NHS Health Education England)
FfL	Framework for Learning
FTC	Fast Track Cities
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GUM	Genito Urinary Medicine or sexual health
HIV	Human Immunodeficient Virus
HPE	HIV Prevention England
LHPP	London HIV Prevention Programme
MSM	Men who have Sex with Men
NHS	National Health Service
NICE	National Institute for Health and Care Excellence
PEP	Post Exposure Prophylaxis
PHE	Public Health England
PLHPP	Pan London HIV Prevention Programme
PLHIV	People Living with HIV
PoCT	Point of Care Testing
PrEP	Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis
PSE	Public Sex Environment
SHS	Sexual Health Services
SoP	Sex on Premises
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infections
TUPE	Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment)
U=U	Undetectable equals Untransmittable
UAI	Unprotected Anal Intercourse

Overview

In March 2019, the GMI Partnership launched its Strategic Plan 2019-2022, which updates the long-term vision and mission of GMI as well as its values.

Vision

A London where people's health and wellbeing is valued and championed regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity and country of birth.

Mission

We provide high quality, holistic sexual and reproductive health and wellbeing services to people and communities with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. Through GMI's enduring partnership, we challenge norms and recognise intersectionality in London, by modelling and championing services, and encouraging others to do the same.

Values

F A I R E R

FRIENDLY

- We will cooperate with all to provide the best services for our communities and stakeholders.
- We will foster both a social and professional environment for staff and volunteers

ASPIRATIONAL

- We will be forward-thinking and make decisions that will enable us to be leaders within the sector
- We will strive to always be curious about the needs of our communities and ambitious about their potential
- We will continually promote staff involvement and well-being by empowering, supporting and encouraging them

INCLUSIVE

- We will challenge exclusion, ensuring that no one is left behind
- We will celebrate difference and diversity within our communities and ensure the involvement of all when designing and delivering our programmes

RESPECT

- We will honour commitments and provide an equal service to all
- We will value the opinions and ideas of clients, staff, volunteers and partners
- We will listen attentively and be non-judgemental, treating others as we would like to be treated
- We will be fair and honest in all our actions

EXCELLENCE

- We will provide value for money by delivering efficient, cost-effective services
- We will shine because of our passion and commitment to quality
- Learning from the challenges we encounter, we will continually improve our offer

RESPONSIVE

- We will respond proactively to the emerging needs of the sector through an asset-based approach
- We will listen to our staff, volunteers, clients and partners and adapt our practices accordingly

History and milestones

- **Pre-2007:** A London HIV prevention programme has been in place for over a decade, focussed on central London and condom distribution.
- **2007:** GMI Partnership is formed in response to our belief that intensive interpersonal interventions, ‘narrowcasting’ was a more effective method to ensure change.
- **2008:** GMI secures its first pan London contract, with London Councils and Local Authorities, to deliver counselling, mentoring and health trainer/outreach in the pan-London HIV Prevention Programme (PLHPP). The target group is Men who have Sex with Men (MSM).
- **2013:** GMI is commissioned by HIV Prevention England (HPE) to deliver HIV testing and outreach.
- **2016:** GMI is commissioned, by London HIV Prevention Programme (LHPP, formerly PLHPP) to deliver HIV testing, outreach and condom distribution, the latter in collaboration with Freedoms.
- **2017:** GMI is rewarded with Innovation Fund by Public Health England (PHE) to deliver PrEP Champions Project, in collaboration with Prepster.
- **2017:** City Bridge Trust (CBT) funds GMI to support the development of the Partnership ensuring that it is fit for purpose to confront emerging challenges and extend its remit from HIV to sexual and reproductive health and LGBTQI+ inequalities.
- **April 2018:** GMI Partnership celebrates 10 years.
- **Mar 2019:** Launch of GMI Partnership Strategic Plan 2019-2022.
- **April 2019:** Oral presentation at BHIVA 25th Annual Conference – *Attitudes and factors to PrEP uptake among HIV risk groups across London*. This presentation was awarded the Mediscript Award for Best Oral Presentation for Work in Social Science or Community-based Work.
- **2019 - 2022:** GMI is funded, on an annual basis by Elton John AIDS Foundation (EJAF) to bring people living with HIV into care through testing and re-engagement of those lost to follow-up or who have fallen out of care.
- **2020 -** GMI changed to the current logo, marking the renewed Partnership.
- **2020 - now:** London Fast Track Cities (FTC) funds GMI’s Migrant and Newly Arrived Mobile Testing Project, in collaboration with Doctors of the World UK, to provide community HIV testing using a van reconfigured to deliver secure and confidential testing services.
- **2020 - now:** GMI is re-commissioned, by LHPP to deliver HIV testing, outreach and condom distribution, in collaboration with the Love Tank and Freedoms, for MSM in London.
- **2020 - 2021:** COVID-19 pandemic.

Advocacy and Communication

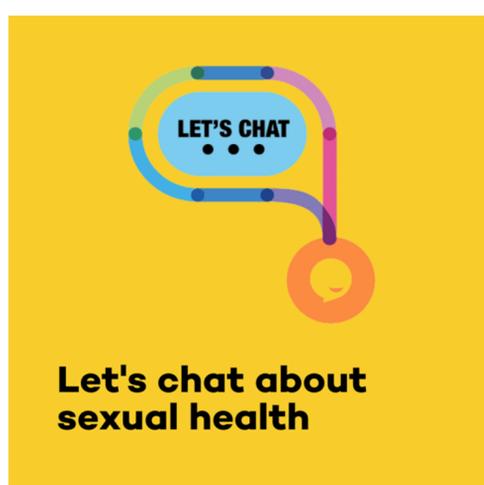
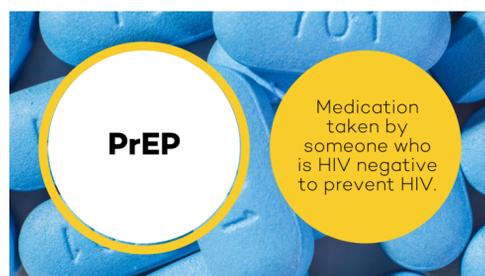
GMI's advocacy and communication strategy was borne out of the belief that the Partnership needed to be more visible to its service users, vulnerable communities in need of its services, other organisations working in HIV and SRH including government, private, academic and the charity sectors, and the general public. In order to do this it became imperative that GMI strengthen its name and brand within the London HIV, SRH and LGBTQI+ sectors whilst also becoming a confident voice and influencer. Highlights of GMI's advocacy and communication work during this period included development of a new logo and the re-vamping of its website, increased social media presence, and sustained advocacy for community-based HIV and SRH prevention and wellbeing.

Social media development

Since 2019, the GMI Partnership has strengthened its utilisation of social media and online platforms. In 2020, we utilised the pandemic experiences to refresh our presence on social media in line with our increased online offer of netreach (internet outreach) and virtual assisted HIV testing.

Assets were developed to highlight the different ways that the community can prevent HIV transmission and to promote our digital services. These were interspersed with emojis, hashtags and the tagging of local organisations to be more visible and to increase our reach.

GMI utilised these templates to develop merchandise and giveaways including hoodies, T-shirts, tote bags, and, branded water bottles and hand sanitiser. This meant that our service users knew how to locate us during outreach and testing sessions, and had the reassurance that the information and services that they were receiving were accurate and professional.



Community

Health Programmes

Existing funders and programmes



Funded by London Councils to deliver the London HIV Prevention Programme (LHPP); 'Do it London', GMI provides outreach for the campaign, providing community-based HIV testing, free condoms and other prevention services for men who have sex with men. Our

testing services target men who have sex with men and aim to be fully inclusive of trans people. HIV testing and free condom distributions usually take place in bars, clubs, saunas and events across London. Time and location of our sessions are available on our website (<https://gmipartnership.org.uk/events/>). We also support men interested in learning more about HIV prevention, such as PrEP, PEP and treatment.

Funded by Fast Track Cities (FTC), we use a mobile clinic to bring free, accessible and welcoming HIV prevention directly to migrant communities living in London. This project recognises the fact that people born outside of the UK, who are living in London, are at risk of late HIV diagnosis or acquiring HIV due to a number of structural and cultural barriers. The clinic parks on high streets, at cultural markets, community organisations and supermarkets, offering free, rapid HIV testing, free condoms and tailored sexual health advice. We offer key prevention messages in a variety of languages and help people access ongoing sexual health support through signposting and referrals. Our clinic usually provides testing sessions on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays across London.



In 2019 GMI was successful in obtaining funding from the Elton John AIDS Foundation (EJAF) Social Investment Bond (SIB). This funding enabled us to expand our existing community-based testing services. They added additional funding to pre-existing models allowing increased testing capacity among the communities we serve. Additionally,

EJAF funding enabled GMI to better engage with HIV positive members of the public, ensuring they were linked to the best service to manage their HIV. This was a unique change for GMI in our approach to HIV prevention, ensuring the most appropriate care for the individual, and helping people adhere to medications, obtain an undetectable status and reduce the chances of onward transmission.

GMI are proud to be a local activation partner for HIV Prevention England's (HPE) prevention services and campaigns in London. We amplify and promote the National HIV Prevention campaign alongside providing HIV testing services to both MSM and Black African communities. As an activation partner, our staff team and volunteers work tirelessly delivering HIV testing and prevention messaging, particularly at key times of the year like National HIV Testing Week.



Relationships within MSM communities

Having worked with MSM communities for over a decade, GMI Partnership has a long-established relationship with those who work with, and for, the communities as well as the communities themselves.

In 2019, largely due to London property development, many MSM venues were closed or became no longer gay specific. GMI Partnership managed to maintain its community reach by strengthening relationships with remaining venues and developing new relationships with organisers of pop-up events, as well as improving referral linkages with statutory service providers.

In 2020, GMI partnered with [the Love Tank](#) (TLT) to deliver the renewed LHPP services. At the start of COVID-19 pandemic, many of our frequented HIV testing and outreach locations were closed due to national lockdown measures. All partners felt the importance to adapt to the new environment and continue providing services to the communities. During times of heightened COVID-19 restrictions, our face-to-face service was suspended. Consequently, we redirected our service to online and virtual provisions, reaching communities through dating apps. When outdoor contact reestablished, we re-routed ourselves to cruising areas and continued providing services to MSM communities.

Since late 2020, together with TLT, we have also started the development of a Community Participation Group (CPG) which brings together underrepresented MSM in a forum to discuss their sexual health needs. It provides the Partnership an opportunity to adapt its outreach and campaign strategy to meet the needs identified. This includes the consideration of those who don't access traditional 'gay spaces', MSM of colour, older MSM and trans MSM.

Relationships within non-MSM communities

All three GMI partners had been working with non-MSM communities individually for a long time. The start of the FTC contract, in 2020, officially marked an extension of the partnered services to non-MSM populations, especially to immigrants and people from minority backgrounds.

GMI conducted a mapping exercise in 2020 and created a database of London local community assets for the immigrant and minority communities. This helped us identify where, and with whom, we could work to increase awareness of GMI's services. GMI uses a mobile clinic to take the free, accessible and welcoming service directly to communities. The mobile clinic navigates through high streets, cultural markets and community organisations, and all areas where target groups frequented, offering rapid HIV testing, condoms and tailored sexual health advice.

The service officially started in December 2020. Due to national and local lockdowns at the time, the service was soon suspended until April 2021. Four sessions were delivered in mid December, with 107 people tested for HIV.

Coming together
is a beginning,
staying together is
progress, and
working together
is success.

HENRY FORD

Partnership

Development and Growth

GMI has been a successful collaboration of three London-based SRH charities for over 10 years. In order to fulfill its vision and mission GMI itself must develop the Partnership by strengthening its governance and leadership and building the capacity of its staff and volunteers. Over the period of this report, GMI has convened meetings to reflect upon and strengthen the workings of the Partnership as well as develop a Capacity Building Framework for Learning.

Governance and leadership

During this reporting period GMI Partnership held three major strategic planning Away Days. Two involved the planning of annual workplans (2019-2020 and 2020-2021). The third Away Day (December 2019) focused on two main outcomes. The first was a revised Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) between the three agencies that make up the GMI Partnership. It ultimately sets out underpinning principles, roles and responsibilities and accountabilities, and is intended to act as a point of reference for all members of the Partnership. The second outcome was the creation of a Partnership Measurement Sustainability (PMS) tool which will be used to annually review the Partnership and ensure that it is working effectively. The PMS tool is based on the principles of relevance, equity, respect and integrity, mutually achieving expectations, and transparency and accountability.

In May 2019, GMI Partnership also undertook to demonstrate its leadership by presenting to the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for London the importance of HIV community prevention. Challenges to delivering services to the community, and why the work of community-based organisations is so important in 'getting to zero' were also discussed.

The Fundraising Working Group generated an additional £805,360 that enabled us to widen our impact, use our skills, knowledge and experience to achieve better outcomes for communities affected by HIV. The CBT Development Programme allowed us to submit seven proposals of which five were successful. Activities allowed us to expand our HIV testing service to migrants and other racialised minorities as well as re-engagement of those clients who were lost to follow-up or who had fallen out of care.

Capacity building

The GMI Strategic Framework 2019-2022 includes activities to build capacity among GMI sessional and volunteer workers, frontline outreach staff, senior managers and CEO/Directors. A Capacity Building Working Group (CBWG) was formed in July 2020 to develop and build capacity through various forms of training. This was followed by a Capacity Needs Assessment, in August 2020, to determine capacity requirements and allow for the prioritisation of capacities that were most desired and needed. A GMI Capacity Building Framework for Learning (FfL) was then developed consisting of:

- Part A – the rationale for the training, types of training, priority training, and how the training is to be monitored and evaluated, together with
- Part B – an Annual Capacity Building Agenda – a spreadsheet of training being offered and recommended for that particular year.

Part A of the FfL has been signed off by the GMI Steering Group and Part B will be continually developed. It is hoped that by April 2022, both Parts A and B will be complete with Part A being revised as needed and Part B being updated annually.

Between April 2019-March 2021, extensive training was provided to GMI staff and volunteers to equip the team with London's updated sexual health information, including all aspects of HIV combination prevention. Additionally, the team was upskilled to deliver an adapted service model under COVID-19 restrictions.

Internal skill share including:

- *Online Outreach*
- *Remote HIV testing consultation*
- *An Introduction to Applied Research*
- *How to Transcribe Semi-structured Interviews*

Externally provided training including:

- *COVID-19 Infection Prevention and Control*
- *Personal Protective Equipment*
- *Safeguarding Adults and Children Levels 1 and 2*
- *Sexual Health*
- *Digital Programme: Getting Noticed on Social Media.*



Research

2019-2020

The GMI Partnership focused on analysing existing data in 2019. With over 12 years work of data covering service users' sexual health behaviours, attitudes, skills and knowledge, GMI was able to review the data and evidence, and analysed some gaps and trends. Some of these findings were shared in the BHIVA, BASHH, AIDS Impact and HPE conferences within this year, including:

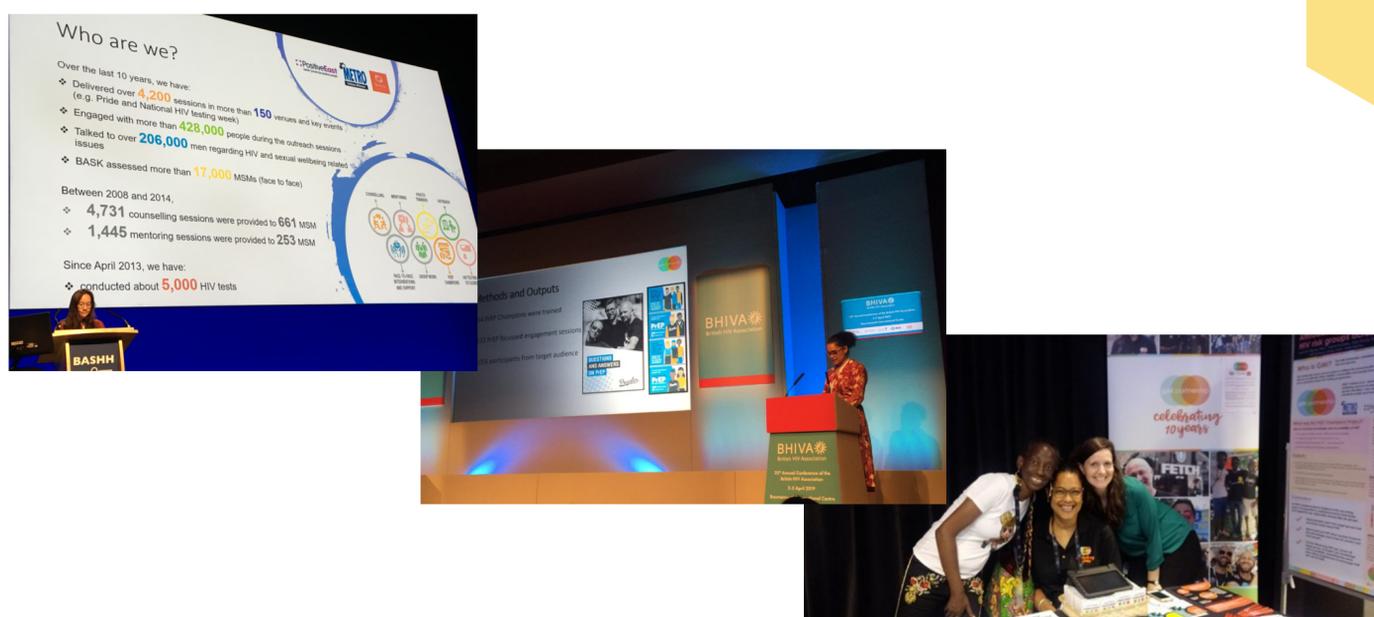
- Attitudes and factors to PrEP uptake among HIV risk groups across London
- Change of HIV risks among MSM in London (findings from cross-sectional online surveys, 2015-2018)
- STI diagnosis among asymptomatic MSM accessing community-based HIV testing services

GMI also commissioned a literature review, in 2019, to examine the reliability of community-based HIV prevention interventions, specifically those with behavioural components, in similar contexts to London. The final document, *Reaching and Sustaining 'Zero' in London: Enhancing Behavioural Approaches within the Combination HIV Prevention Framework*, examined 22 studies, comprising 6637 participants from MSM, BAME, PLWHIV, heterosexuals, women, sex workers, individuals convicted of crime and trans people were analysed. The review underscores the importance of behavioural aspects in a combination HIV prevention approach, rather than a solely biomedical approach, to reach zero new infections in London.

2020-2021

In the year 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most of GMI's face-to-face activities including outreach and HIV testing services were suspended. It was believed that the COVID-19 control measures may impact people's sexual health and wellbeing, as well as other aspects of health. In order to better able to support our communities during and after the pandemic, GMI and partners conducted two surveys, in April and November, and a literature review exploring people's sex life and activities, changes in sexual behaviours and use of sexual health services. The findings from these studies will be presented at the [26th BHIVA/BASHH conference](#) in April 2021.

- *Changes in sexual behaviours and access to sexual health services, of Londoners, during the first COVID-19 lockdown.*
- *A study of MSM sexual behaviours in London during COVID-19 restrictions (together with [the Love Tank](#))*
- *Advocating for community-based behavioural approaches within the combination HIV prevention framework: A literature review.*



Volunteering

GMI Partnership is effective because there is extensive access to volunteers from all three agencies, as well as volunteers specific to GMI Partnership, contributing significant amounts of time to the outreach and back-office support for delivery. Volunteers enable us to build capacity quickly, as well as work flexibly with venues and communities. There were over 50 registered volunteers in 2019. We celebrate our volunteers with a range of social outings and could not provide the work that we do without them.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, due to the lack of physical interaction, it was very challenging to manage volunteers. GMI had to explore new ways to maintain the volunteering relationship. To avoid losing engagement from volunteers and to provide support to them during the pandemic, we started to have online social activities from April 2020, including bi-monthly “Zoom Quiz” and “Zoom Movie”. We also sought to use the opportunities to build capacity and provided monthly online training, covering a series of sexual and mental wellbeing subjects.

Our volunteer team has continued to grow during the pandemic and we took the opportunity to ensure our readiness for return to face-to-face services when it became possible. To achieve this, we supported frontline volunteers in getting their COVID-19 vaccination as soon as this became available, with the help of our LHPP commissioner from Lambeth council.



HIV Prevention



Outreach to our communities



Mobile service



HIV rapid test



STI sampling and other additions



Up-to-date information and resources



Connect to the communities remotely



Make a difference for the communities



Improve team alignment and culture



HIV prevention has been the core service provision of GMI Partnership for over a decade. During the past two years, under funding restrictions, GMI focused its service on community outreach and Point of Care Testing (PoCT).

The GMI Partnership serves all MSM, who live, work or socialise in London regardless of HIV status. Service users' needs are assessed, focussing resources on prioritising men with the most complex needs.

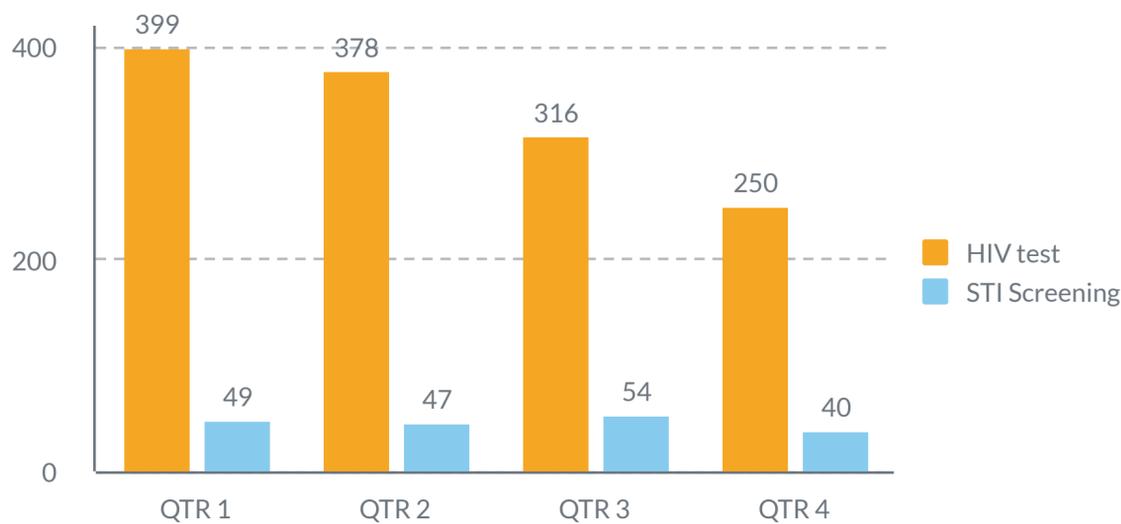
In the year 2020-21, although COVID-19 pandemic deterred our long-established services, the same period also marked some great developments for GMI Partnership, including the introducing of remote testing and mobile testing services, as well as formally extending service target groups to migrant and minority communities.

Testing & Outreach

2019-2020

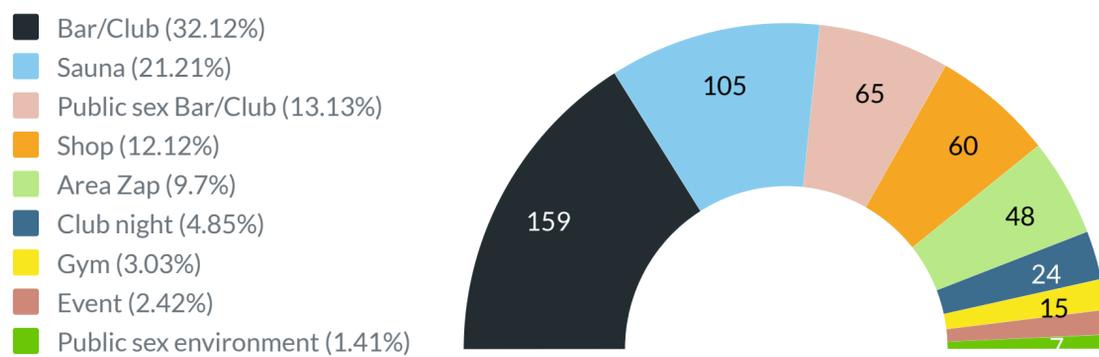
GMI's outreach services are delivered in a variety of community settings, with priority given to venues where risk factors are highest. One-to-one support is offered against initial contact assessments with potential for follow-ups and facilitated by robust referral pathways into partner agencies' services and those of other London providers.

Wherever possible, GMI successfully incorporated rapid HIV testing and asymptomatic STI screening into our outreach service, using our strong relationships with venues. GMI Partnership also used HIV self-testing kits and STI self-sampling kits to demonstrate and to coach service users on how to test themselves, as well as providing PoCT.



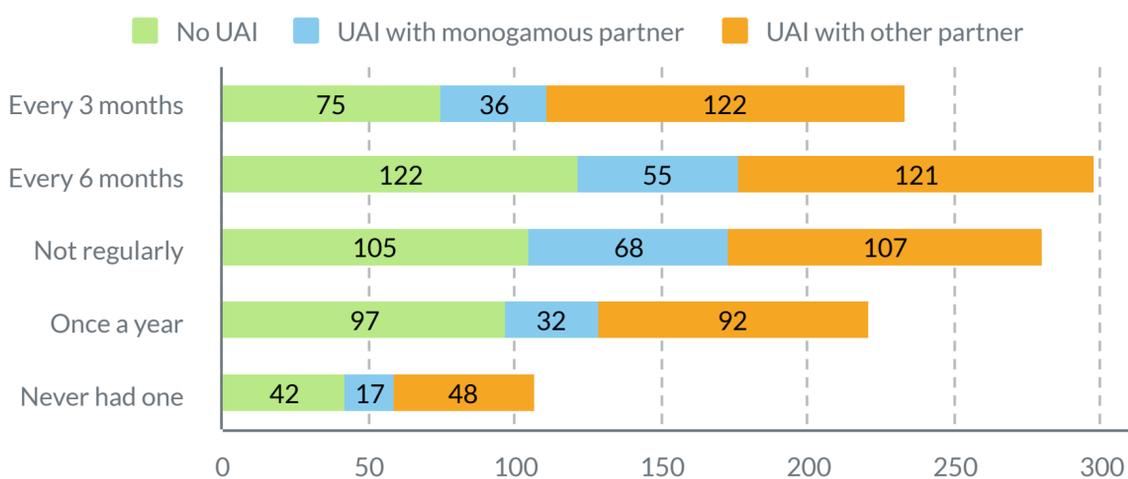
1343 HIV tests
190 STI screenings

Five reactive HIV test results; HIV positivity rate was near 0.4%. About 20% of the STI screenings returned positive diagnoses of at least one type of STI.



495 outreach sessions

Contacted over 45,000 MSM; distributed over 50,000 condom and lube packs. 44% of the sessions took place in venues where high-risk MSM frequent.

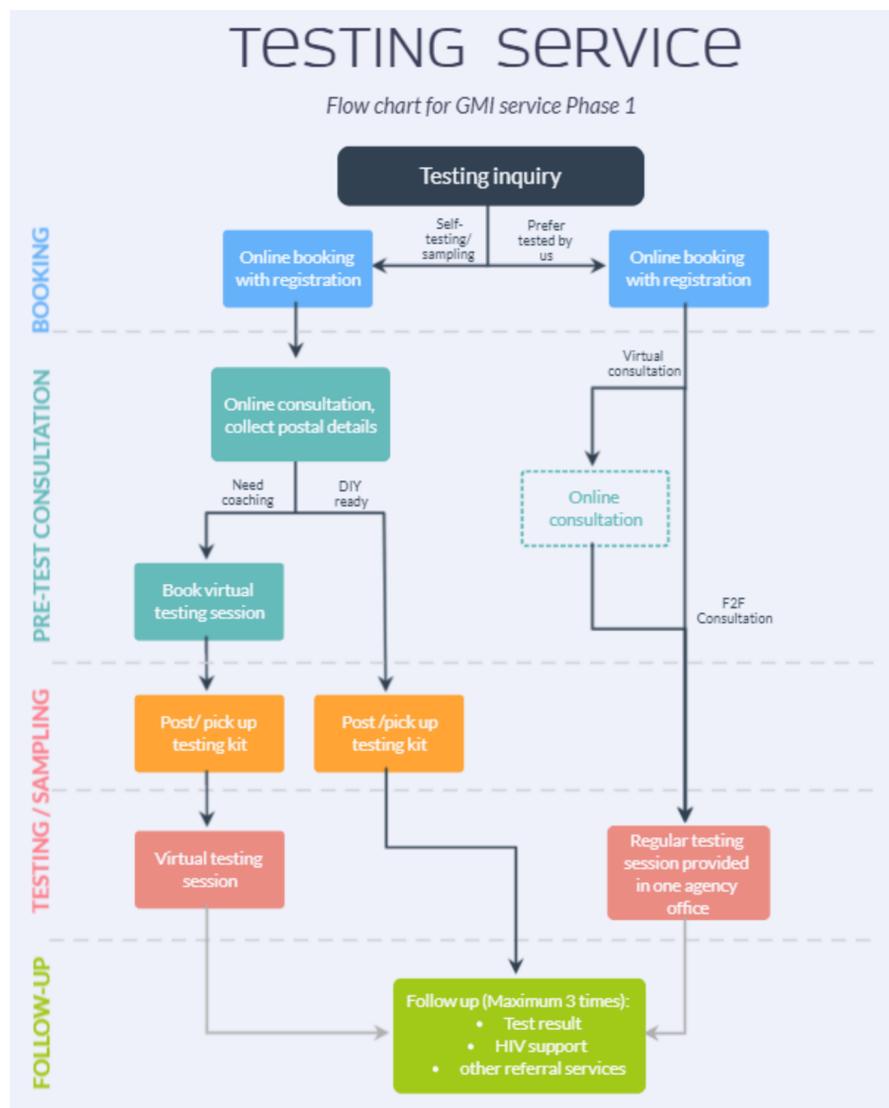


9% never had an HIV test before

41% reported unprotected anal intercourse with non-monogamous partners. More than half of them tested less frequently than every 3 to 6 months.

2020-2021

Since March 2020, the UK government has instituted a series of measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, such as social distancing, local and national lockdowns and tier systems. GMI was forced to cease almost all face-to-face activities including core outreach and HIV testing services in the year 2020-2021. However, the GMI partners sought creative ways to deliver services and products to key target groups, and mobilised all resources to develop suitable services under COVID-19 restrictions.



In addition, four face-to-face outreach sessions were conducted during periods when there was a slight easing of lockdown measures. 107 people had HIV tests during these sessions. This is largely due to the success of our newly introduced mobile testing service. The mobile testing unit enabled us to continue to bring services to the communities and to keep COVID-19 risk under our own control.

While physical outreach was limited, GMI adapted alternative solutions during this period. Near 300 online outreach sessions were conducted in the year, through which, GMI reached over 31,000 MSM via popular dating apps, including Scruff, Grindr, Recon and Jack'd.

Through these online outreach sessions, GMI was able to pass HIV and sexual health information and link those with more in-depth needs to support services, e.g. chemsex, counselling and mentoring.

Although HIV testing service was also offered remotely, the uptake was not as high as expected. Just under 30 people used the services.



An essential part of the outreach service, in the year 2020-21, was to maintain the connection with our outreach partners, i.e. venue owners, and keep an up-to-date communication network. GMI team made a considerable effort to check in with partners in preparation for the resumption of our face-to-face services. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, more policies and guidance have been in place to ensure the health and safety of both our team members and the public. GMI outreach team has endeavoured to seek a balanced new model to deliver our community services, which had been put in action after April 2021.



Secondary prevention

Since the GMI Partnership successfully obtained funding from the Elton John AIDS Foundation (EJAF) Social Investment Bond (SIB) in 2019, we reinforced our service pathways to guide and support newly diagnosed service users into care and treatment, as well as re-engage people living with HIV and ensure their linkage into the care system.

This piece of work expanded GMI's core focus beyond testing and broadened our community focus to include both HIV and HIV negative service users who were being engaged in a more holistic way in our overall approach to HIV prevention. We trained our staff and volunteers with strategies for HIV+ re-engagement of lost to follow-up service users or those who have fallen out of care. We also created and refreshed relationships with both Genito Urinary Medicine (GUM) and HIV specific clinics across London to ensure ease of access and removal of barriers for service users.

By March 2020, before the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, we successfully detected 12 new infections through GMI and partners agencies' services, and successfully re-engaged three service users into care and treatment.

Securing the EJAF programme was a pivotal moment for GMI, where we began to broaden our target audiences beyond an MSM/LGBTQI+ focus. It also changed and improved our overall approach and HIV prevention offer and encouraged us to look beyond a prevention model that focussed solely on testing and detection. As EJAF funding comes to an end in 2021, the benefits and changes to our approaches to HIV prevention will continue through our ongoing bodies of work.

POST

COVID-19

The GMI Partnership responded rapidly to COVID-19, adapting service models where this was possible, to ensure a continued responsive and dynamic service provision. During the first two lockdowns, GMI carried out two Sex and COVID-19 surveys, which informed our subsequent adaptations to services.

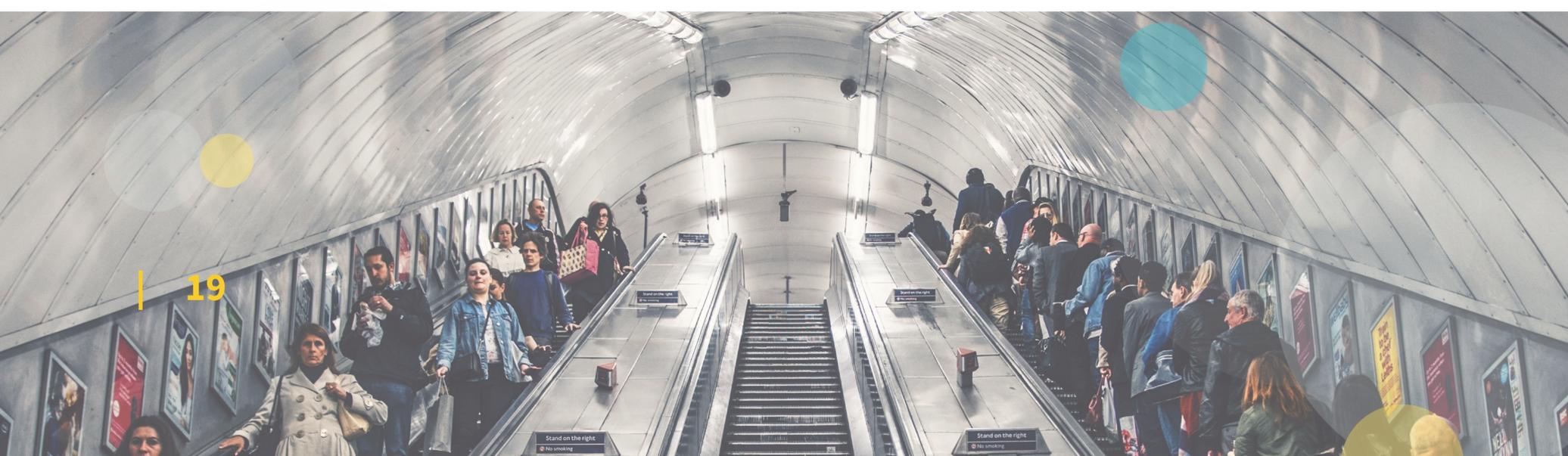
Adapting services involved moving to an online model including offering zoom appointments for one-to-one support, chat functions on our website, and recording a video on how to order, complete and return an HIV test. GMI also offered one-to-one coaching to help service users who had difficulty self-testing to accomplish this. Via our partner, Freedoms, we were also able to post out condoms and lube to those requesting them.

Some core services were not possible to adapt immediately e.g. face-to-face HIV testing and outreach in indoor venues. However during lockdown, GMI purchased a mobile clinic and testing bus which ensured that as lockdowns eased we were able to quickly scale-up and operate from a contained, safe environment and offer face-to-face services. As soon as restrictions allowed, GMI adapted its service models, for example offering a booking system (with a COVID-screener to ensure symptomatic clients were not booked) for HIV tests and other support. This worked well and after 15 months into the pandemic, GMI was able to resume outreach and testing activity within a cautious, responsive and continually risk-assessed model. This was aided by early offers of vaccines to our staff accessed via NHS and local authority colleagues.

In a shifting digital landscape, we recognised that people might be facing digital exclusion or fear of exposure by bringing our service into their homes. The ongoing need for coaching, and community-led in-person services, means we will continue to offer our hybrid service model.

The toll of COVID-19 on the mental health of service users has been observed and additional staff training to support this was put in place. We are committed to responding to the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and its heightened impact on the sexual health of the communities we serve. As well as decreased mental health resilience and increased isolation of many of our service users, we recognise the impact of PrEP on different parts of London's communities. We strive to address the needs of those who have not accessed PrEP, whilst addressing the emerging sexual health needs of those using PrEP and those who have been unable or reluctant to access sexual health screens and other services during lockdowns.

GMI has emerged, with the sector, from this pandemic having weathered a challenging period yet with new resources and tools to face evolving demand, and a stable and committed staff and volunteer group with which to meet the future.





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