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Sexy Side of the Netherlands

An Alternative Approach to Engage MSM and Transgender Newcomers in STI/HIV Testing and Care

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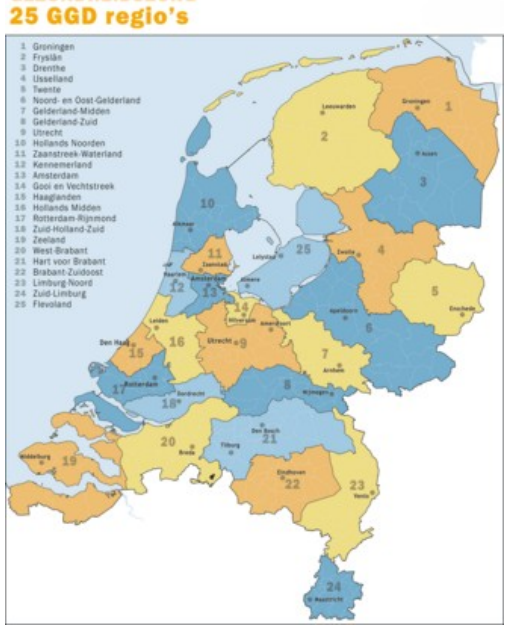
Background



- Complex Dutch healthcare system, difficult to navigate
- Residents are expected to be registered with a GP
- STI/HIV testing via GPs or Municipal Health Services (GGD)
- Municipal Public Health Services (GGD) free, but only available for key populations
- Healthcare for asylum seekers organized separately from mainstream care

- 2017 (confidential) report: high HIV rates among MSM asylum seekers
- Municipal health services could not provide testing within shelters

- Outreach approach: combining social activities outside shelters, with STI/HIV testing and vaccination

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Approach

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- Social outreach events at a LGBTQI+ club in Amsterdam
- Free travel to support nationwide participation
- Safe and welcoming environment

- On-Site STI/HIV counseling, testing, and hepatitis B vaccination by healthcare staff
- Peer and volunteer-led engagement



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Objectives

- Connect MSM and transgender newcomers to STI/HIV services



- Increase understanding of Dutch STI/HIV care
- Build trust in healthcare services through direct contact with staff and volunteers
- Promote sexual health action and informed decision-making

- Strengthen peer connections and reduce social isolation

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Key Components of the Outreach Model

Recruitment & Participation

- Recruitment through social media and peer networks
- Event held outside asylum reception centers at a popular LGBTQ+ venue in Amsterdam
- Travel costs covered through complimentary train tickets

Creating a Welcoming Environment

- Complimentary food and beverages
- International music reflecting participants' diverse backgrounds
- Informal, social setting without structured educational sessions

Access to Services

- GGD trained volunteers available to answer questions and encourage testing and vaccination
- Peer interpreters supporting communication with GGD services
- On-site STI/HIV testing and hepatitis B vaccination

Continuity of Care

- Referral and guidance to local GGD services for follow-up care
- Multilingual health information and resources shared by email



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Results

- 2023 – 2025: **10** events organized

		# Positive	Positivity Rate
STI Tests	480	75	15.6%
HIV Tests	426	7	1.64%
Never Tested Before	26.8%		

%Positivity GGD
23%
0.3%

MSM	80.6%
Transgender	11.6%



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Disscussion

- Festive, community-based events were effective in reaching MSM and transgender asylum seekers and newcomers.
- The high HIV positivity rate suggests that outreach approaches can help identify undiagnosed infections and connect underserved newcomers to STI/HIV care.
- Nearly 73% reported previous HIV/STI testing, despite known testing barriers in many countries of origin.
- This unexpected finding raises questions about the reliability of self-reported testing history and possible differences in participants' understanding of HIV/STI testing.
- Further research is needed to explore testing experiences and potential reporting bias.



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