

## **Project Overview** : Common Data set for Sexual Health

During the past decade, the rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) have escalated at an alarming rate in the United Kingdom. Unintended pregnancies also continue at a high rate. England currently has one of the highest teenage birth rates in Western Europe. Evidence of increased risk taking and, often, poor control of infections, have all helped to raise the level of concern among health professionals, the Government and the public.

The NHS provides a comprehensive range of sexual health services – including GUM clinics, community contraceptive services clinics and services in primary care – but analysis undertaken in developing the [National Strategy for Sexual Health and HIV](#) has indicated that *‘too often [services] are fragmented, poorly advertised and too narrowly focused*. Access is a problem in most parts of the country. Information on sexual health is often out of date or simply not available.

The National Strategy for Sexual Health and the recent [Public Health White Paper](#) set out a programme that begins to put things right. This strengthens existing programmes that prevent sexual health problems, and sets out important new measures for improving people’s understanding of the issues, for better planning of services and for better provision of treatment. The White Paper announces the intention to set a goal that, by 2008, everyone referred to a GUM clinic should be able to have an appointment within 48 hours. It also signals the establishment of a Health Information and Intelligence Task Force to lead action to develop and implement a comprehensive public health information and intelligence strategy. This includes working with the Health Protection Agency to develop effective systems in Sexual Health.

To support the implementation and monitoring of the National Strategy, the Department of Health is seeking to develop a Common Data Set for Sexual Health (CDSSH). The Common Data Set is intended to provide a single, standard structure for collecting data on sexual health within the National Health Service. It will apply to all settings providing sexual health services such as Genito-Urinary Medicine (GUM) clinics, contraceptive services, integrated sexual health services and primary care.

There are two clear key goals for implementing a common data set:

1. To obtain local sexual health data that will help clinicians to improve the quality of service provided to patients at a local level
2. To obtain common disaggregate data from different settings that will enable the Department of Health and the Health Protection Agency Centre for Infection to improve surveillance of sexually transmitted infections and other sexual behaviour related health issues as well as to improve its ability to monitor and implement the sexual health strategy.

A draft specification of the data set can be seen and downloaded from <http://www.cdssexualhealth.org.uk/hsp/factsheets.php>. The complete data set will be collected in a consistent format from all GUM clinics. A reduced data set would apply within contraceptive services, integrated sexual health services and primary care. A further item on waiting times is also proposed. The specification also indicates which items are to be collected from each type of service. Further detailed work is required to complete the specification, which must then be formally agreed by all stakeholders. The specification then needs to be validated and, if necessary, further developed through an extensive and inter-related series of steps, including piloting, consultation and finally approval by the NHS Information Authority, to the point where it is ready to be fully implemented across the country.