

SH:24 delivers over 2 million STI tests kits, making public budgets go further

The digital sexual health service posted over 5 million individual STI tests, reducing the cost of testing by over 50% compared to face to face consultations.

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(Community Interest Company)

delivers online sexual and reproductive health services across the UK and

Ireland in partnership with the NHS and the Ireland Health Service Executive (HSE).

The logo for SH:24, with "SH" in dark blue, a teal colon, and "24" in dark blue.

The not-for-profit has now posted over 2 million STI test kits (over 5 million individual tests) at a time when sexual health services are at a breaking point due to rising demand and funding cuts, as highlighted in a recent report by the Local Government Association (LGA)*.

“

Digital services provide public commissioners with a valuable tool to deliver more for less - making budgets go further and ensuring clinical capacity is better utilised”

Chris Howroyd, CEO of SH:24

The total number of sexual health consultations in the UK rose by 16% from 2020 and by 36% since 2013, whilst cuts in funding have led to a 17% reduction in spending on sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing, contraception, and treatment over the past seven years**.

SH:24's model is based on working in partnership with the NHS. It is not designed to replace NHS clinics, but to make

better use of public funding and give people better access to specialist health services.

Their online service reduces the cost of STI testing by over 50% compared to face to face consultations. The rapid results service means that infections are diagnosed quickly, reducing transmission and uncomplicated infections can be treated at home, freeing up clinical capacity for more complex care.

A key part of SH:24's mission is to make sexual and reproductive health services more accessible

to everyone, particularly higher risk populations who might otherwise face barriers to testing and treatment.

Rebecca Spencer, General Manager of Integrated Sexual Health Services in Derby and Derbyshire, commented:

“SH:24’s online service has enabled us to free up the time of specialist nurses and doctors to better manage the high demand we face in sexual health clinics and ensure more time is spent on supporting and managing complex patient needs, such as the management of HIV and syphilis infections”

Public health commissioners and providers of sexual health services have made repeated calls to the UK government to address the long-term funding and capacity challenges across local authority commissioned sexual health services.

Chris Howroyd, CEO of SH:24, commented:

“Whilst demand continues to outstrip capacity, many frontline sexual health services continue to face significant funding cuts. In 2013, services were under similar pressures , which triggered the creation of SH:24”.

“Digital services provide public commissioners with a valuable tool to deliver more for less - making budgets go further and ensuring clinical capacity is better utilised”.

“We remain committed to working with NHS Trusts’ and other frontline service providers across the UK to co-design services which meet local needs, both clinically and financially. We believe physical clinics are essential and continue to strive towards a hybrid model, whereby local services can fully leverage the potential of digital for their own needs”.

About SH:24

SH:24 is a multi-award winning digital sexual health service, working in partnership with the NHS to deliver online sexual and reproductive services across the UK, 24:7.

The service, recently rated outstanding by the Care Quality Commission, was established in 2013 with a grant from Guy’s & St. Thomas’ Charity, has contributed to double access to sexual health services and went on to receive numerous awards such as The Queen’s Awards for Enterprise for innovation and The Guardian Public Service Awards.

As a not for profit, SH:24 has an appetite for social good, innovation and sustainable growth. Since 2013, they have doubled access to sexual health services. For areas where it is not commissioned, SH:24 provides affordable services through its sister company Fettle Health.

Notes to editors

In addition to STI testing, SH:24 offers contraception and genital diagnosis, and operates a unique business model whereby its paid-for service [Fettle.health](#) runs in parallel to the free service, only available in commissioned areas. This allows SH:24 to provide high quality services at fair, affordable prices, whilst reinvesting any surplus to drive down the costs for commissioners to provide public services free at point of use via SH:24.

Infection rates for the four most common STIs are rising in the UK. The proportion of chlamydia tests delivered through internet services increased from 40% in 2020 to 43% in 2021; the proportion of diagnoses made through these services increased from 36% to 40% over the same period.***

Rates of syphilis have risen with an 8.4% increase in diagnoses between 2020 and 2021***. Early diagnosis is crucial to effective treatment. Online services like SH:24 allow users to test at home with a simple finger prick blood test. SH:24's specialist clinicians work hand in hand with frontline clinicians to manage cases, referrals and 24/7, one to one support to users.

References

* Local Government Association. Breaking point: securing the future of sexual health services. 15 Nov 2022. <https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/breaking-point-securing-future-sexual-health-services#key-messages>

** Sexual health services are at "breaking point" after £1bn in cuts since 2015
<https://www.bmj.com/content/379/bmj.o2766>

*** Sexually transmitted infections and screening for chlamydia in England: 2021 report
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/sexually-transmitted-infections-stis-annual-data-tables/sexually-transmitted-infections-and-screening-for-chlamydia-in-england-2021-report>

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For media assets visit <https://sh24.org.uk/press>

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