

GetCheckedOnline: Better access to testing for sexually-transmitted and blood-borne infections

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Screening for sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections (STBBI) is a critical step in enabling effective treatment, reducing serious complications and decreasing downstream transmission. Multi-factorial barriers exist related to STBBI screening, including but not limited to access to services, wait times, concerns around confidentiality, stigma, and fear of judgement or discrimination. The GetCheckedOnline (GCO) program was developed to mitigate many of these barriers and increase access to screening, particularly for equity-seeking populations.

GCO is a publicly funded, internet-based service for STBBI screening offered through the Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA) in British Columbia (BC), Canada. The goals of the GCO program are to:

1. Increase the uptake and frequency of testing for STBBI.
2. Reach people at higher risk of infection and facing barriers to accessing existing testing services.
3. Reduce demands on community and public health providers offering STBBI testing.

Patients create an account and a lab requisition through the GetCheckedOnline.com website. They then bring their requisition on a mobile device to a participating LifeLabs location for specimen collection. Depending on the results, findings are either given online or by a specialized STBBI nurse. Offered tests include HIV, syphilis, chlamydia, gonorrhea and hepatitis C, with all diagnostic testing conducted by the BC Public Health Laboratory (BC PHL). A clinical algorithm was developed and validated to recommend STBBI tests based on patient answers to an online risk assessment. This low-barrier service is free for anyone to use, and importantly - given the confidentiality concerns that patients have about STBBI testing - patients do not have to use their real name, show identification or be registered with BC's medical services plan to be tested.

GCO launched in Vancouver, BC in 2014, with phased expansion to 7 additional communities across BC over a 6 year period. Utilization of GCO, and requests to expand, continue to increase with time, such that at least one new community will be added in 2024. The service is custom developed, tailored to the BC healthcare context, and operated by the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) in partnership with the BC PHL, Provincial Laboratory Medicine Services (PLMS), LifeLabs and participating Regional Health Authorities.

GCO serves as a virtual extension of the Provincial STBBI Clinic at the BCCDC. The service is modeled on and continues to adapt to STBBI testing guidelines and best practices utilized by the Clinic and the BCPHL. The clinical algorithm, test recommendations and clinical management for GCO are designed to offer a similar standard of care as BCCDC's clinic-based testing services. A single ordering provider for all GCO tests ensures that GCO patients, regardless of geographic location, are connected to treatment, follow-up care, education and partner notification through specialized STBBI clinicians at the BCCDC.

For more information, please visit <https://dishiresearch.ca/research-areas/internet-based-testing/>

