

GetCheckedOnline wins global UNIVANTS of Healthcare Excellence award



Leaders on the GetCheckedOnline team, from left to right: Susie van der Valk (PHSA), Dr. Mark Gilbert, Meghan McLennan and Devon Haag (BCCDC), and Garth Graham (LifeLabs). Photo provided by UNIVANTS of Healthcare Excellence.

It's a big year for GetCheckedOnline, a BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) testing service for sexually transmitted and blood-borne (STBBI) infections. The team was announced as the top global winner of the prestigious [UNIVANTS of Healthcare Excellence awards](#) on July 8, and 2024 marks the 10-year anniversary of the sexual health program in B.C.

"GetCheckedOnline was developed with the idea of leveraging technology to increase the accessibility of testing for sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections, particularly for people who have been traditionally underserved and marginalized," says BCCDC Chief Medical Officer Dr. Jason Wong.

The program also aims to increase the uptake and frequency of testing, reach people at higher risk of infection and reduce the demand on community and public health providers. The team sees over 3,000 testing episodes every month and its services are currently available in eight B.C. communities on Vancouver Island, in the Lower Mainland and Interior B.C., with plans to expand to northern B.C. this summer.

People can use the GetCheckedOnline website to fill out a sexual history questionnaire that generates a lab form to get tested for chlamydia, gonorrhea, HIV, syphilis and hepatitis C. The next step is to visit a participating LifeLabs location and provide blood, urine and/or self-collected swab samples.

Clients don't have to see a health care provider or be registered to B.C.'s medical services plan to test, and they receive their test results through their

GetCheckedOnline account. Any necessary follow-up care is provided by the BCCDC STI clinic and its regional health authority partners.

"The program also empowers folks by providing them with evidence-based resources on the risk of sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections and how they can reduce the risk of these infections, including through routine screening," says Dr. Wong.

"Grounding the program in the needs and priorities of communities has been integral to the success and growth of the program over the past 10 years."



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Strong lab component

GetCheckedOnline works with select LifeLabs locations to facilitate sample collection from clients. All diagnostic testing is done by the Public Health Laboratory (PHL) at BCCDC.

“Our partnership with GetCheckedOnline is a great example of how labs are integral to the health system,” says PHL Medical Director Dr. Linda Hoang.

“And a great example of how we can achieve success through innovation that is implemented by having all the touch points of a patient’s journey coordinated, with the goal of improving access and care.”

PHL operations manager Meghan McLennan says after samples are collected by LifeLabs, they’re shipped to the PHL’s pre-analytical department and then flow into different parts of the lab, depending on the type of sample and the testing required. GetCheckedOnline testing is performed in six areas of the PHL: high volume serology, public health advanced bacteriology and mycology, zoonotic and emerging pathogens, and virology, with a technical support team that’s always working behind the scenes.

Public health partnerships

Dr. Mark Gilbert, the physician and research lead for GetCheckedOnline at BCCDC, says building effective partnerships has been critical to the program’s success.

“It’s a complex health service that requires us to coordinate support across multiple partners, including laboratory, information management and technology, public health, clinical and community services,” says Dr. Gilbert.

“Our team has prioritized building these partnerships right from the early planning phases in 2009. It takes a village.”

GetCheckedOnline involves the STI clinic, Online Sexual Health Services program and PHL at BCCDC, Provincial Laboratory Medicine Services (PLMS) and Provincial Digital Health and Information Services (PDHIS) within the Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA), as well as the regional health authorities. The privately owned and operated lab company LifeLabs, and software developer Linus Software Inc., are external partners.

Craig Ivany, Chief Provincial Diagnostics Officer for Provincial Laboratory Medicine Services at PHSA says it’s an incredible honour to be selected for a UNIVANTS award, and he agrees that collaboration has been crucial.

“Because the Public Health Laboratory works in direct partnership with the BCCDC, there is a natural relationship that fosters innovative solutions to meet the needs of the community,” says Ivany.

“Working in unison, the teams are able to respond quickly to public health threats and develop innovative solutions to testing and monitoring for infections together. I’m thrilled to see all the teams who have played a role in GetCheckedOnline’s success receive local and international recognition for their contributions to public health in B.C.”

Susie van der Valk, Manager of Specialized Provincial & Ancillary Solutions for PHSA, says her team at PDHIS supported GetCheckedOnline by finding and fine-tuning technology that supports the program’s mandate and clinical vision. She adds that there has always been a strong focus on and respect for the ultimate goal of supporting people and their health.

“We took the time to get it right and continue to take measures to improve the service,” says Van der Valk.

“It brought together a wonderful group of people who have all worked hard to make this vision a reality. It feels very energizing for this work to be recognized.”



GetCheckedOnline relies on an extended team of public health professionals from BCCDC, PHSA and LifeLabs to offer STBBI testing throughout B.C. Photo provided by UNIVANTS of Healthcare Excellence.

Top row (left to right): Thomas Marshall (LifeLabs), Devon Haag (BCCDC), Garth Graham (LifeLabs), Vivianna Cuyegkeng (STI Clinic), Karmen Olson (BCCDC STI Clinic), Dr. Mark Gilbert (BCCDC). **Bottom row:** Meghan McLennan (BCCDC PHL), Susie van der Valk (PDHIS), Heather Pedersen (BCCDC), Natalie Holgerson (BCCDC STI Clinic).

Global recognition

The UNIVANTS (“unity” and “avant-garde”) of Healthcare Excellence award program recognizes teams who collaborate across disciplines to transform healthcare delivery and improve the lives of patients.

Winning teams are featured in Modern Healthcare magazine in the U.S. and team leaders are invited to share their best practice at a leadership forum, with other potential speaking opportunities at media events, think tanks and workshops.

UNIVANTS awards are given out annually by American multinational Abbott Laboratories and its program partners at professional societies, institutions and associations involved in healthcare around the world.