

# Expand Your Reach

## FAQs about adding STI services

### 1. Do STI services get more abortion-minded/at-risk women to come in? Do AM/AR clients remain the priority?

Absolutely! STI services are essential in reaching abortion-minded/at-risk women and men. The STI client is the demographic who is, or may eventually be pregnant and at high-risk for abortion. Importantly, providing a fuller range of sexual-related health services *has proven to increase attention and presentation of women actively seeking abortion services!* LifeChoices saw a 125% increase (from 33 to 69) in abortion-minded women in 2013. These women had an abortion plan, or stated they were undecided about their pregnancy plans, yet they came to our clinic after they were informed of our services. The possible health-risks associated with positive STI results and the dangerous link if undergoing an invasive medical procedure such as an abortion, is a relevant issue for the health conscious woman.

A woman's health is an important and imminent need – we can help her understand that. The *woman's-health-focused* medical services we offer speak louder than anything we can ever tell her. STI services allow us to enter her life and help her move past the initial panic of the moment. Abortion-minded/at-risk women will always receive priority due to the urgency of their situation. Skillful scheduling can typically overcome any priority challenge.

### 2. Aren't STI (sexually transmitted infections) services mission creep?

Each year our organizations spend thousands of dollars on advertising to draw clients, but we tend to miss the most important part of marketing – **consumer relevance**. For individuals who suspect they have STIs, their needs are urgent and many are driven to get help. The question is: Where will they go? If we are not reaching out to them, others will, but rarely do they hold compatible advice. ***We have a unique opportunity to reach hearts through holistic services – especially when the STI client one day returns as the at-risk for abortion client.***

In order to engage the Millennial generation and younger, it is crucial that we offer them relatable services. STIs are on their minds and statistically, rampant in their bodies. The CDC estimates nearly 20 million new STI cases are diagnosed every year in the USA, with half of them being found in the 15-24 year old age range.

Sexual health services have become a highly competitive industry. If we are serious about challenging this industry in the “sexual health marketplace” we must be willing to open our minds to new perspectives and opportunities if we want to win the battle for life. STI services fit hand-in-(latex-free)-glove with other services offered in Pregnancy Medical Clinic/Centers.

Repositioning ourselves as a **Sexual Health Clinic serving with relevance and respect** moves us to a top-of-the-mind awareness for at-risk individuals. *We have an opportunity to become the face of reproductive help in our communities!*

**3. What is the biggest challenge in adding STI services to your clinic?**

The day-to-day demands are typically the primary challenge. However, this can be reduced by ensuring good preparation, experienced training, proven processes and having solid policies/procedures/medical protocols in place. Maintaining good communication between staff is essential. Learning from others' learning curves helps anticipate, resolve and avoid many challenges.

**4. Do you charge your clients?**

There are no charges for services. Most clients are asked to reimburse the cost of their lab fees. This small reimbursement helps our budget and encourage individuals to take ownership in their situation. Collaborating labs may bill Medicaid if applicable and thus cover the entire cost of the lab fees. (NOTE: If a woman is considering an abortion, she is not asked for any lab fee coverage.)

**5. How many additional staff/volunteers will it take?**

This is totally dependent on how many individuals you may serve, the appointment visit flow, and the client's sexual healthcare needs at their initial visit. Many healthcare positions are well-filled by volunteer physicians, PA/Nurse Practitioners, RNs, MTs and CNAs. STI services have proven a GREAT way to engage many more medical professionals from the community.

**6. What about men?**

The male partner is integral in STI and pregnancy situations. Too often, men have been seen as a side issue, but they are often more receptive to *life* than their partner! If a woman is tested and treated, but not her partner, the couple can be re-infected and the opportunity for healthy outcomes completely missed. Testing men brings great ministry opportunities – physically, emotionally, relationally and spiritually. Outreach to the men in our culture is a **powerful way to change the culture for life**.

Many of these male patients have returned with girlfriends, friends, classmates, and family members who are in need of sexual health services or who may be exploring abortion options. What great confirmation of the decision to invest in many lives through the addition of STI services!

**7. What do I do about my Medical Director? He/she is really nervous about us adding STI services.**

As a well-trained medical team with excellent policies and procedures in place, the information implemented through training will hopefully allay concerns by your MD. Most often these concerns are rooted in the understanding that STI services must be provided by those qualified to do so. LifeChoices can connect your Medical Director or interested volunteer physicians with peer physicians from LifeChoices to answer many questions and provide encouragement.

**8. What kind of budget should I be preparing for?**

This answer depends on many factors, such as: is there a local lab which can be utilized for lab testing? What will you want to do in-house? Will the local or state health department engage with your organization in some way (such as donate collection items, etc.?) Will local pharmacies provide a discount for your clients needing prescriptions filled? How many staffing costs can be provided by volunteer medical professionals?

Since the presence and growth of STIs are one of this country's most urgent health concerns, multiple opportunities for partial funding support is being found by many clinics. The actual cost varies widely due to arrangements and competitive pricing. (A budget sample will be reviewed during the STI Training Seminar.)

**9. We don't have to be medical to add some STI services, right? Wouldn't it just be enough to do the urine screening for Gonorrhea/Chlamydia (G/C), and then we don't have to do that blood stuff?**

To put it simply, testing for STIs should NEVER be delivered by a nonmedical organization. Any organization which does so puts itself at high risk and fuels attacks of widespread "fake medical clinics" sentiment.

Providing only a urine test for G/C might be easier, but it is certainly not viewed as best practice. Consider this: if an individual is at-risk for one STI, he/she is also at-risk for many others. How sad would it be that a client left your building believing that he/she was "clean" because he/she didn't have either G/C? We owe our clients the most reputable services we can deliver; it is essential that we provide industry standards of care, rather than try to get around them.

Medical professionals are trained to handle blood products safely. Let's equip them to do their jobs with integrity and excellence.

**10. How do you handle STI treatment? If there is a positive result, do you just send them to the health department or does your Medical Director see them at his/her office?**

Where better could an individual be when his/her STI results are positive? Know your state laws regarding treatment protocols and standing order directives. Standing orders and public health directives, define how to deliver treatment, call in a prescription or refer the patient to one of our vetted physicians who will support our counseling approach. No longer do we wonder if all of our work is "undone" at another community office because we could only *refer* elsewhere for testing and treatment. Let's not miss the many opportunities to deliver strong health care and complete holistic circle of body, mind and spirit.

**Becoming a Sexual Health Clinic is an achievement well worth the investment!**

Secure your registration by contacting us at [www.lifevoices.org](http://www.lifevoices.org) or email [products@choicesmedical.org](mailto:products@choicesmedical.org). Space is limited.

