

Reducing Barriers, Increasing Access: Preliminary Outcomes of the GetaKit Program

To: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

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Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board of Health receive this report for information.

Key Points

- The GetaKit¹ (GAK) program is an innovative, online, testing initiative for sexually transmitted infection (STI) and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), developed by the University of Ottawa, Ottawa Public Health and the Ontario HIV Treatment Network, which increases access to testing for high-risk populations.
- Since GAK was implemented in December 2024, early data suggests that Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health (WDGPH) has greatly increased access to STI/HIV testing for priority populations of clients who are high risk for STI/HIV and under the age of 30.
- By adopting GAK, WDGPH aims to reduce STI/HIV testing barriers, improve access to testing, and support WDHPH's strategic plan by improving health outcomes, innovating Agency programs and building strong partnerships.

Background

Sexual Health (SH) care has long been a principal service provided by public health units as outlined by the Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS). WDGPB SH clinics serve a varied population including urban and rural areas and diverse sexual and cultural communities. STI and HIV rates in the Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph (WDG) region are stable and well below the provincial average. There was an increase in all STI's, especially syphilis and HIV, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, however, those rates are now slowly decreasing to pre-pandemic levels.

WDGPB provides SH services to some of the most vulnerable residents in the region. Anyone can access care, however, the priority populations are clients who do not have access to primary care, clients who do not have an Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) or are on the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and clients who are unable to access SH care through traditional channels for multiple reasons, including transportation, clinic availability and concerns about stigma or confidentiality. WDGPB provides SH care through clinics at a variety of different sites, however, WDGPB explored opportunities to provide SH services differently to provide improved access to care for high-risk clients.

GAK provides an innovative, discrete, on-line, self-testing platform that allows clients to test for STI/HIV in the privacy of their own home. Clients only require access to a phone and computer and must have an OHIP card. WDGPB began partnering with the GAK program in November 2024.

Discussion

GAK, which was developed in collaboration with Ottawa Public Health, the University of Ottawa and Ontario HIV Treatment Network, aims to make sexual health testing simple, private and accessible. GAK offers free and accessible HIV and STI testing services. The GAK platform operates through a website that houses a clinician-developed algorithm which recommends appropriate tests and preventive services based on self-assessment and public health guidelines. GAK offers testing to clients who meet specific criteria.

Criteria includes:

- Must live in Ontario
- Be HIV negative or unsure of their HIV status
- Not be enrolled in a HIV vaccine trial
- Not have a bleeding disorder
- Sexually active and asymptomatic or use injection drugs.

GAK provides the following:

- Laboratory-based testing for STI, including HIV, chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, and hepatitis C, with requisitions supported by a physician, for clients over the age of 17.
- At-home HIV self-testing kits for clients over the age of 18.
- Results are usually available between 3-7 days and clients are notified by email or text.
- Clients can view their results online
- Clients with positive results are contacted immediately to discuss treatment, follow up testing and other support services
- Clients are also given recommendations for preventive services like vaccinations, HIV prevention strategies, and contraception.

By removing barriers that can be present in clinic settings, GAK empowers clients to take control of their health, promoting timely testing, diagnosis, treatment and prevention. These factors contribute to the early detection and the reduction of onward transmission of STI/HIV.

By integrating GAK into SH services, WDGPB has improved access to some clients who experience barriers. Since partnering with GAK, 212 unique clients have accessed the GAK platform for testing. In 2025 alone, 136 WDG residents have accessed GAK, while WDGPB STI clinics screened 328 asymptomatic clients for STI/HIV. This represents an increase in access to asymptomatic testing in the WDGPB region of 41.4% in the first 6 months of 2025. This increase may not be entirely due to the implementation of the GAK program, but it is most likely a significant factor. Additionally, WDGPB was able to provide a marked increase in access to STI/HIV testing without increasing staffing compliment making this venture extremely cost effective.

Below are a series of figures which provide a visual representation of the of clients who have been accessing GAK.

Figure 1 outlines the specific groups who are utilizing GAK. The priority population are clients under the age of 30. HIV priority population are clients who face barriers to traditional HIV testing, especially individuals from marginalized communities and who may be less likely to seek testing at SH clinics. Specifically, this includes gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (gbMSM), individuals of African, Caribbean, or Black descent, and individuals who use substances. First time clients make up close to 50% of GAK clients and 98.6% of clients who access GAK meet the testing criteria which was outlined in the first paragraph of the discussion section.

Figure 1 – Uptake Metric

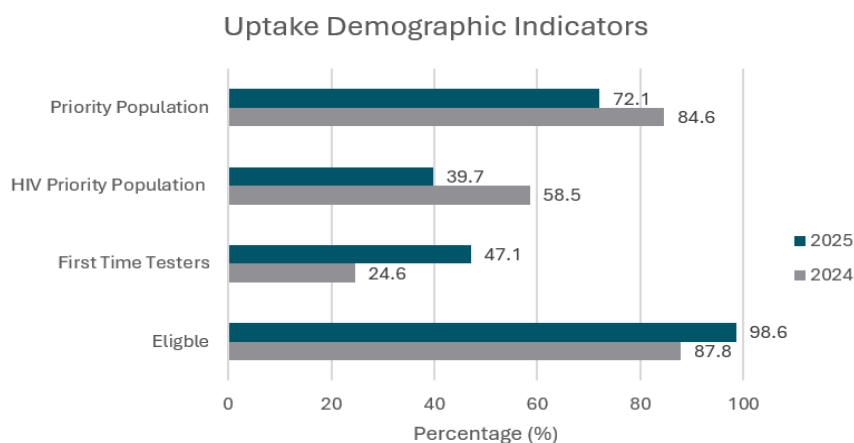


Figure 2, Gender metric that demonstrates that clients who identify as women are by far the largest group accessing GAK followed by clients who identify as men or trans/non-binary (NB)

Figure 2 – Gender Metric

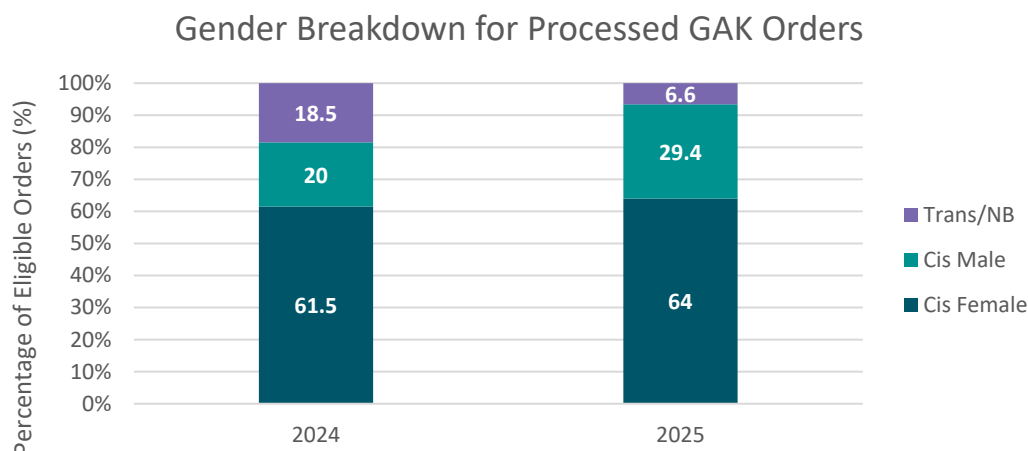


Figure 3 illustrates that 63.1% of clients who accessed GAK identified as white while the remainder identified as Black, Indigenous or People of Colour (BIPOC). These results are reflective of the ethnic composition of the WDG region.

Figure 3 – Ethnicity Metric

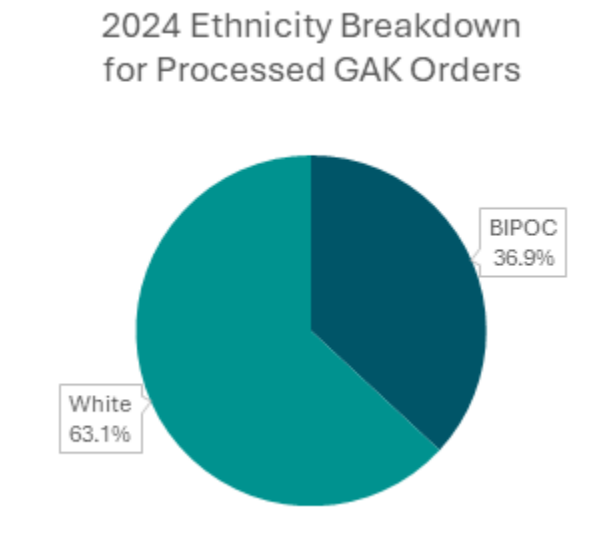


Figure 4 reveals that most of the clients accessing GAK identify as heterosexual, followed by other and gbMSM individuals.

Figure 4 – Sexual Orientation Metric

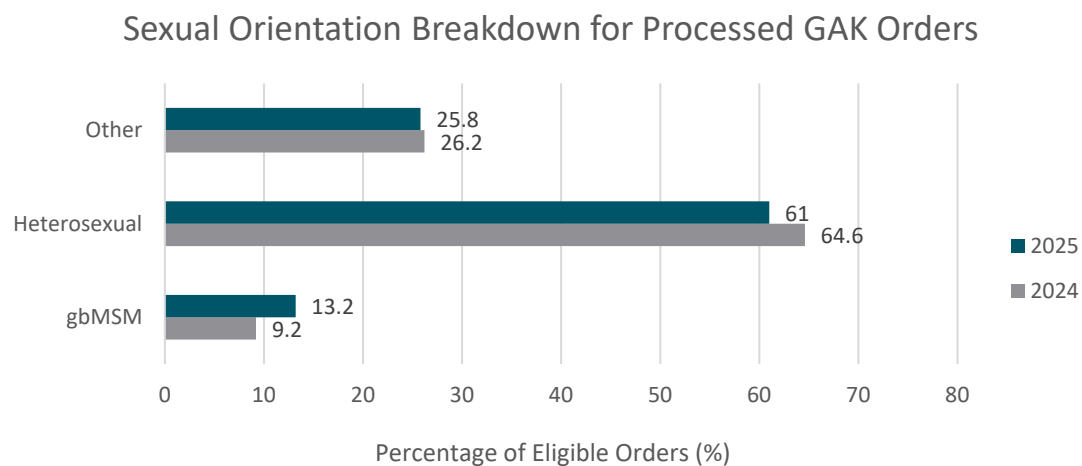
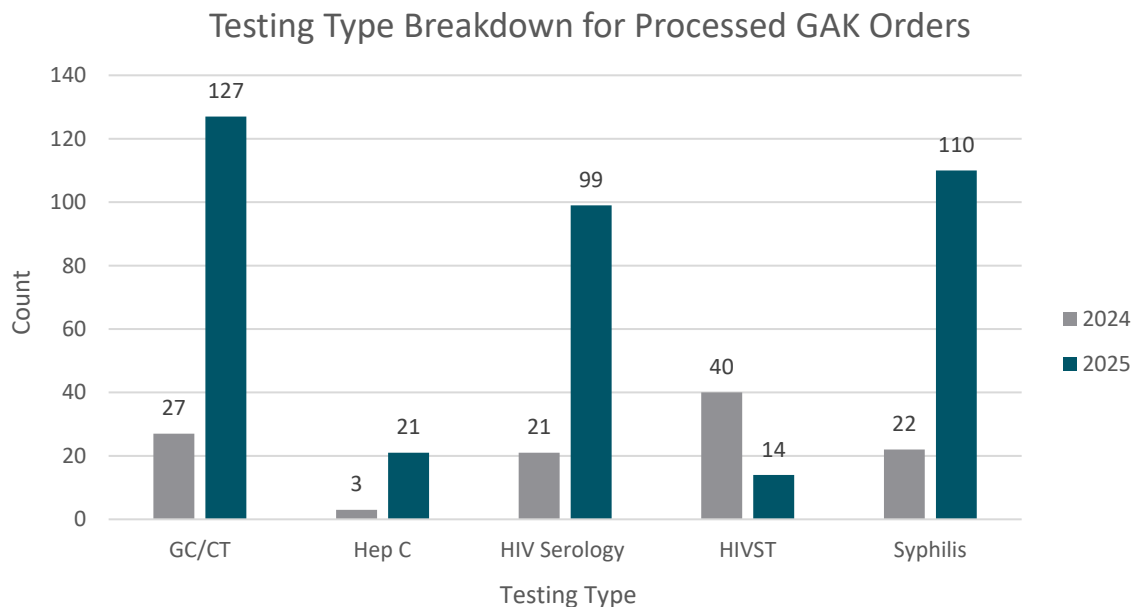


Figure 5 reviews the types of STI/HIV testing most frequently ordered by clients accessing GAK. Most clients ordered chlamydia (CT) and gonorrhea (GC) testing followed closely by serology for syphilis and HIV. Serology for hepatitis C (Hep C) and HIV self-testing were the least ordered tests.

Figure 5 – Testing Metric



Health Equity Implications

As stated previously, SH services have long been foundational for all public health units including WDGP, however, for various reasons, including access, stigma, and fear, many individuals do not seek SH services. WDGP's priority is to ensure and enhance equitable access to these services for everyone across the region. WDGP continues to work towards this goal by implementing the following:

- WDGP offers SH services throughout the region. Clients can access SH services at the Orangeville, Fergus and Guelph offices.
- WDGP offers SH clinics outside of regular office hours.
- WDGP offers SH clinics at sites in the community, including the Royal City Mission and there are plans to open at the Palmerston Grove Youth Hub in September 2025.
- Partnering with the GAK program, which provides an alternative option for clients who are unable, for various reasons, to access SH services through traditional channels.

Conclusion

Partnering with GAK has allowed WDGPB to expand STI/HIV testing services. There has been a significant increase in STI/HIV testing access for high-risk populations who often find challenges in accessing traditional clinic-based services. The innovative GAK platform utilizes simple technology, widely available to most individuals, to creatively and cost effectively provide better access to SH care. Moving forward WDGPB plans to further promote GAK for all populations in the region.

Ontario Public Health Standards

Foundational Standards

- ☒ Population Health Assessment
- ☒ Health Equity
- ☒ Effective Public Health Practice
- ☐ Emergency Management

Program Standards

- ☒ Chronic Disease Prevention and Well-Being
- ☐ Food Safety
- ☐ Healthy Environments
- ☐ Healthy Growth and Development
- ☐ Immunization
- ☒ Infectious and Communicable Diseases Prevention and Control
- ☐ Safe Water
- ☐ School Health
- ☐ Substance Use and Injury Prevention

2024-2028 WDGPH Strategic Goals

More details about these strategic goals can be found in [WDGPH's 2024-2028 Strategic Plan](#).

- ☒ Improve health outcomes
- ☐ Focus on children's health
- ☒ Build strong partnerships
- ☒ Innovate our programs and services
- ☒ Lead the way toward a sustainable Public Health system

References

1. GetaKit. (2025) University of Ottawa. <https://getakit.ca/>