

# Sexual health service clients & providers identified six desirable features of online HIV/STI risk calculators

## Study implications:

- Incorporating these identified features in the design of future online HIV/STI risk calculators may help improve their acceptability among end-users.
- When well-designed and endorsed by reputable institutions, these tools can complement traditional sexual health services and help fulfill a public health prevention goal.

## What is this study about?

"Risk calculators" for HIV/sexually transmitted infections (STIs) use the answers to a set of sociodemographic characteristics (e.g., age, sex, ethnicity, geographic location), health status, or behavioural questions to estimate a person's risk for developing or acquiring HIV and STIs, and to accordingly indicate the most appropriate action to take.

Identifying features for online HIV/STI risk calculators to be appealing to clients and providers is important because more and more individuals turn to the internet to find sexual health information and more and more sexual health services and tools are offered online. We did this study to figure out the content and format features that are desirable to potential end-users of these online HIV/STI risk calculators.

## What did we do?

We invited BC Centre for Disease Control's STI clinic clients and service providers to participate in focus groups to interact with and discuss a few HIV/STI online risk calculators that varied in content and question characteristics, target audiences, completion lengths, and recommendation messages. From five discussion sessions with a total of 12 STI clinic clients and 5 service providers, we identified the main desirable features.

*"I was thinking about what I really wanted out of a tool like this. It's something like a mini dial-a-nurse, or like going into a walk-in clinic to just have a chat with someone and be like "this is what I did, this is what I experienced," you know, talk to me about what might have happened or something like that."*

## What did we find?

Desirable features of online HIV/STI risk calculators	Participants said...
1. Personalized risk assessments	They wanted assessments that reflected their specific sexual behaviours and HIV/STI-related concerns
2. Customized risk assessment & tailored educational information	They wanted sophisticated assessments that went beyond merely providing generic messages and recommendations
3. Numeric risk estimates	For some people, measurable or numeric estimates were important in making sense of risk information.
4. Non-stigmatizing framing & inclusive design	The language employed to convey information in the tools had to avoid equating sex with risk or judging users for being sexually active, and the design had to be inclusive of different genders, sexual behaviours, racial and ethnic identifications, and languages.
5. Explanations & actionable next steps	It was important for people to understand the questions asked and results provided as well as receiving information on concrete actions they could take next to address HIV/STI prevention and testing.
6. Effective & appropriate branding	They wanted adaptable and reliable tool interfaces, recognized institutional backing of the tool, and transparency about the privacy of the information provided in the calculation.

Summarized from article: Gómez-Ramírez O, Thomson K, Salway T, Haag D, Falasinnu T, Grennan T, Grace D, Gilbert M. "Mini dial-a-nurses" and "good brands": What are the desirable features of online HIV/STI risk calculators? *AIDS Education & Prevention*. 2020;32(6).