

# Cervical Cancer Screening in Vanuatu

## Summary of Evaluation

May 2020



VANUATU



### Increasing Access to Cervical Cancer Screening in Vanuatu - Evaluation published January 2018

#### Background

Cervical cancer is inconsistent. Every year, more than

**270,000**   
**WOMEN DIE FROM CERVICAL CANCER**

with more than 85% of deaths occurring in low and middle income countries. Cervical cancer screening saves women's lives, however screening is not routinely available in Pacific nations. Consequently, women in Vanuatu are dying up to five times the rate of women in Australia.

#### Increasing access to cervical cancer screening in Vanuatu

To establish a cervical screening program in Vanuatu, Family Planning NSW partnered with the Australian Cervical Cancer Foundation (ACCF) in 2017 to provide training and clinical capacity building to local implementing partner Vanuatu Family Health Association (VFHA).

The project was supported by the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccines and careHPV<sup>®</sup> DNA testing kits were donated for a five-year period and a designated cervical screening clinic was established in Port Vila. Local midwives and registered nurses participated in an education program facilitated by Family Planning NSW to provide high quality cervical cancer screening. The program included classroom-based learning, clinical assessment, updates, mentoring and monitoring.

In addition to screening services, outreach and awareness-raising activities were also undertaken in villages on Efate and Espirito Santo islands, along with more remote islands Tanna and Malekula.

#### Capacity building of clinicians

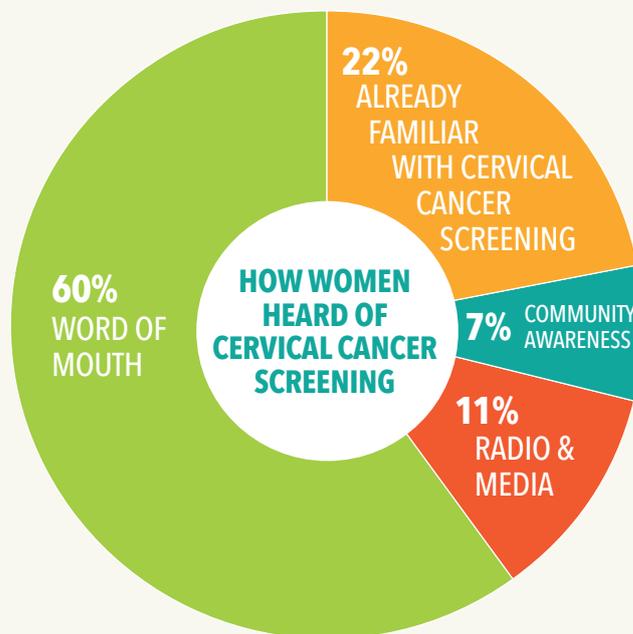
Family Planning NSW trained nine nurses in clinical HPV DNA screening and community education activities, effectively increasing the capacity of local healthcare workers. Ongoing support by Family Planning NSW after the training provided regular updates and mentoring. The clinicians were happy with the training program and found it to be helpful, relevant and important. Their suggestions to improve the training in the future included increasing the duration of the training, providing more resources, and expanding training to include nurses working in more rural areas.

### Effective outreach and increased screening rates

To increase screening participation, community education and outreach activities were carried out by nurses and community workers. In addition, information, education and communication (IEC) materials were developed to promote screening. IEC materials included posters with key messages in local language, broadcasts on local radio, and a counselling flipchart developed by Family Planning NSW for use by nurses in clinical consultations and community awareness sessions. Outreach promoted the need for screening, along with addressing misinformation about screening.

The majority of women who attended for screening heard about the program through word of mouth. Community awareness activities only accounted for 7% of those who attended cervical screening, highlighting the need for further development of this program. Suggestions of improvement included face-to-face presentations by trusted nurses that addressed misinformation about cervical cancer and provided mobile screening services immediately after community education sessions.

Awareness of cervical cancer and screening was raised among at least 3,400 community members. The majority of women were reached through word of mouth, indicating the satisfaction of clients with the screening program.



### Improved laboratory processes

The two hospitals in Vanuatu that have laboratory and treatment facilities with the required capabilities had other competing priorities, resulting in a backlog of results, suspended screening and consequent delayed treatment. This highlighted the need for the clinical pathways to be changed to ensure that careHPV® testing was successful in delivering results in a timely manner.

In March 2017, laboratory processes were changed and an ACCF volunteer began overseeing all HPV DNA processing at Vila Central Hospital laboratory. This altered practice of processing results both locally and in Australia resulted in the improved turnaround of one month and nurses receiving HPV DNA results in expected timeframes.

*"Nurses need to give uniform messages to make women understand. We use the word cancer a lot in our messaging – this scares the women. We don't want to scare women about talking about cancer"*

- SH2

*"Things like the posters are good – they give the messages in a simple way"*

- SH2

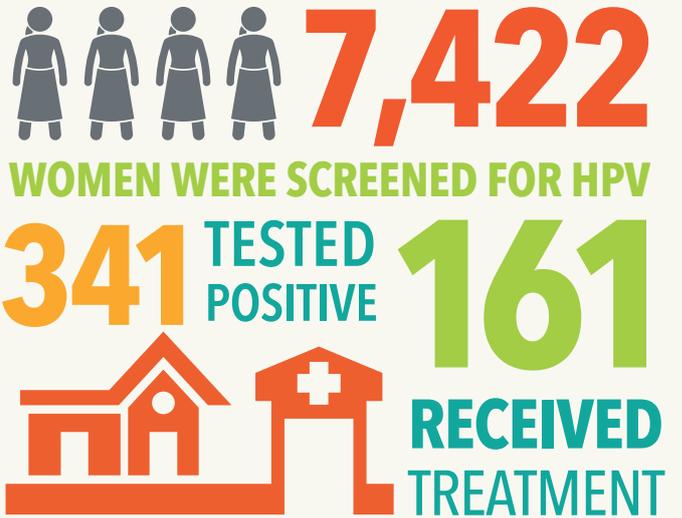
### Sustainability

Family Planning NSW's project ended in 2019, but the nurses trained continue to use their skills in the VFHA clinics. The project however, would have benefited from the development of a national prevention, screening and treatment policy. This would also have helped to define a realistic clinical pathway to ensure that all women in Vanuatu have access to efficient cervical cancer screening and treatment.

### Conclusion

Overall, the project was successful in educating women about the importance of cervical cancer screening, and building the capacity of local healthcare workers and institutions, and increasing rates of cervical screening.

*Note:* data and information in this report taken from the January 2018 "Evaluation: Increasing access to cervical cancer screening in Vanuatu" covering the period 2015-17



*"I was so happy with my visit because although I still look healthy, I doesn't (sic) know what's happening in my body. The nurse from the cancer clinic is so helpful"*

*Screening client (age 43).*