

## SHIFT – A Retrospective



The **SHIFT (Sexual Health in the Over-45s) Project** was co-designed to address inequalities in sexual health and wellbeing in the over 45s (including in marginalised populations, traditionally not the focus of sexual health policies and campaigns, despite a backdrop of rising STI rates in older adults.

**SHIFT** developed and delivered a model of Sexual Health for over 45s, to empower the group, to raise awareness and knowledge of their sexual health and wellbeing, as well as increase access to support/services and reduce stigma. The approach was further tailored to work with marginalised adults – including migrant communities, refugees, sex workers – to ensure its adaptability to benefit socio-economically disadvantaged groups of all kinds, given their even greater likelihood not to access sexual health information and services. The model incorporated training for healthcare professionals and the wider workforce, narrative films, community and direct outreach, and a website.

A real strength of the **SHIFT** Project is its public website, which continues to experience high levels of engagement, facilitating delivery of the SHIFT Model to its target populations. The website contains relevant content across a wide range of sexual health issues – not simply the best-known STIs, but related issues such as menopause, aiding with wider health literacy.

The six **SHIFT** films represent a key asset with further potential to realise. They are freely and fully accessible online and were rated very positively at screenings, and helped attract national and international media to cover the project. The films utilise the power of narratives as a more effective way of presenting health messaging compared to more traditional public health warnings from governmental health agencies (Heley et al., 2020).

Economic evaluation proved challenging with this project, as anonymity was key to raising awareness and reducing stigma, so statistics around reductions in STIs, earlier diagnosis, etc. cannot easily be credited to the project. Nevertheless, given the cost of treating late-diagnosed infections, coupled with the increased likelihood of such infections being spread prior to diagnosis, each individual understanding and taking control of their sexual health has the potential to protect public health, and in so doing, reduce costs of healthcare and drugs.