



Masters research scholarship in “Acceptability of Dried Blood Spots for At-Home Blood Borne Infection Screening among Māori Men Who Have Sex With Men”

We invite applications from suitably qualified candidates to undertake a 120-point Masters thesis (fulltime, 12 months) on the topic “Acceptability of Dried Blood Spots for At-Home Blood Borne Infection Screening among Māori Men Who Have Sex With Men”. We are particularly encouraging applicants who identify as Māori to lead this important work.

The scholarship is offered as part of a multi-year HRC-funded study based at the School of Population Health, University of Auckland. The lead supervisor is Associate Professor Peter Saxton and the candidate will be mentored by Te Whāriki Takapou, a Māori-led sexual health organisation.

Study background

The successful candidate will work on data collected in SPOTS: Sex and Prevention Of Transmission Study (www.spots.org.nz). This is a multi-centre study led by the University of Auckland in partnership with the University of Otago, New Zealand AIDS Foundation, Te Whāriki Takapou, Body Positive and New Zealand Blood Service. The main aims of SPOTS are to collect data that will: eliminate HIV transmission; remove unfair discrimination in blood donor deferral policy; reduce undiagnosed HIV, Hepatitis C and syphilis. The study population is men (cis and trans) who have sex with men (MSM), trans or non-binary people who have sex with MSM, and younger gay, bisexual, takatāpui, pansexual or queer men who have not had sex with men. The study has ethics approval from HDEC. Participants will have already completed an online questionnaire and been invited to provide a self-completed dried blood spot (DBS) at home for testing of blood-borne pathogens.

Focus of the Masters research funded by this scholarship

The student will lead research into the acceptability of DBS among takatāpui (Māori MSM). This will include a literature review, description of methods and measures, statistical analysis of relevant behavioural and DBS data (including DBS requests, submission to laboratory, biological data, requests for return of specimens), discussion of findings.

Candidate qualification

Candidates should have qualifications (or be working towards a qualification) in health sciences, population health or a related discipline. A commitment to the health advancement of takatāpui is essential. Familiarity or interest in sexuality minority populations, Māori health and/or blood borne infections such as HIV, syphilis or Hepatitis C is an advantage.

Application details

Eligible students should contact Associate Professor Peter Saxton (p.saxton@auckland.ac.nz) with (a) a cover letter outlining your interest in the research and why you would make a suitable candidate; (b) your CV; (c) your academic transcript; (d) proposed start date.

The value of this scholarship is \$20,000 for one year (note it does not include compulsory Masters fees, however the award can be used to pay these).

We are looking for a student to begin either semester two in July 2022, or semester one in February 2023. Applications are **open now** and there is no deadline. An award may be made without notice. Interested students are encouraged to contact the lead supervisor as soon as they can to discuss the opportunity.