

Wales HIV Testing Week: a joint public health and community-led approach on widening access and uptake of HIV testing in Wales

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Background:

HIV testing is crucial for ending HIV as a public health challenge. We present an evaluation of the impact of a strategy co-designed with volunteers and communities to promote HIV testing as part of **Wales HIV Testing Week 2023**. This was delivered in partnership with Public Health Wales and community groups, including Fast Track Cymru - a national collaborative network of clinicians, local authorities, universities, and community organisations working to prevent late diagnoses. Here we consider the impact of different strategies used to promote 2021, 2022 and 2023 Wales HIV Testing Weeks.

Methods:

The campaign runs in Wales in November, mostly online, asking people to visit the platform for ordering a postal test kit offered by Sexual Health Wales. The 2023 and 2022 campaigns involved promoting community champions, instead of international celebrities as in the 2021 campaign, to produce advertising material. Data was collected from mainstream social media platforms and "click-tracking". Pre-campaign advertising starts in October, with measurable impact until December; therefore, all-STI postal test order data includes figures from October to December, from 2020 to 2023. To assess the different campaigns, we also compared monthly click-tracking data from different Wales HIV Testing weeks (2020-2023).

Results:

Test orders increased in Wales from 5,787 in November 2020; to 8,254 in November 2021; to 8,433 in November 2022; and to **c.9,006 in November 2023**.

Online reach increased significantly during the 2023 campaign period on social media: on Twitter/X, impressions increased from 61k in 2022 to 1.3 million in 2023; and via Meta Ads campaign from 46k in 2022 to 1.1 million in 2023.

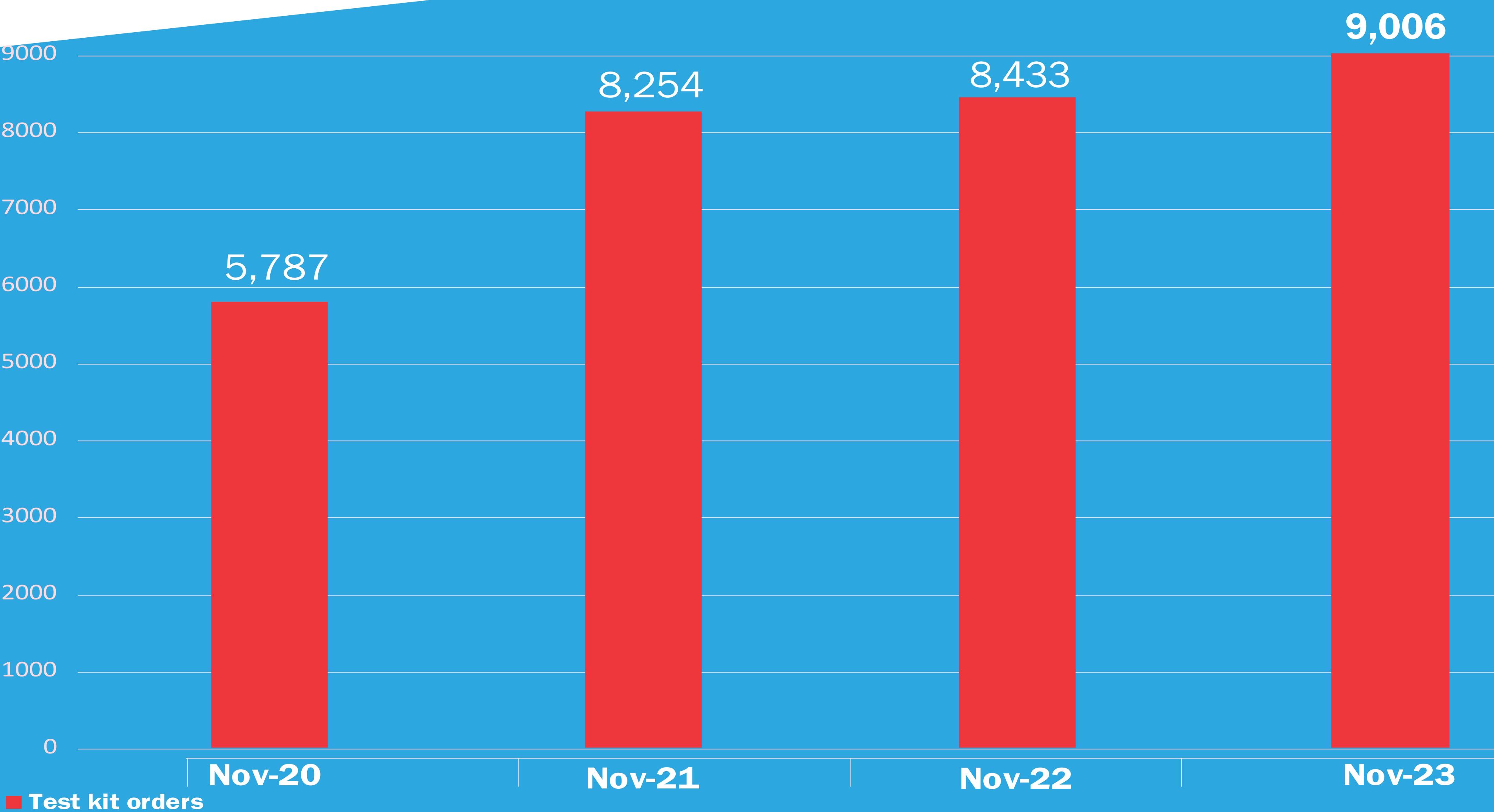


Figure 1. STIs postal tests from online booking – Sexual Health Wales - All STIs test kit orders. The graph shows the increase of all-STI orders online from 2020 to 2023

Smart links or click-trackers suggested a similar conversion in 2022 and 2023 from social media engagement into website clicks to order test kits: from 558 clicks to order test kits in November 2021; to 1,558 clicks in November 2022; to c. 840 clicks via smart links in 2023. However, built-in links via Facebook and Twitter/X recorded 1,827 and 5,948 additional clicks respectively. Volunteers and local community champions continued to be at the centre of campaign materials, including posters, images and videos, in both English and Welsh. This approach built on learning from previous years. The ads continued to be geo-targeted to best reach people in Welsh postcode areas – for high local take-up. Although the Sexual Health Wales website was rebranded, its previous name “Frisky Wales” resulted in the largest number of searches and clicks (c. 1,400 searches of clicks of the 2,834 recorded). Programmatic display was also planned on dating apps in 2023, which resulted in more than 531k impressions.

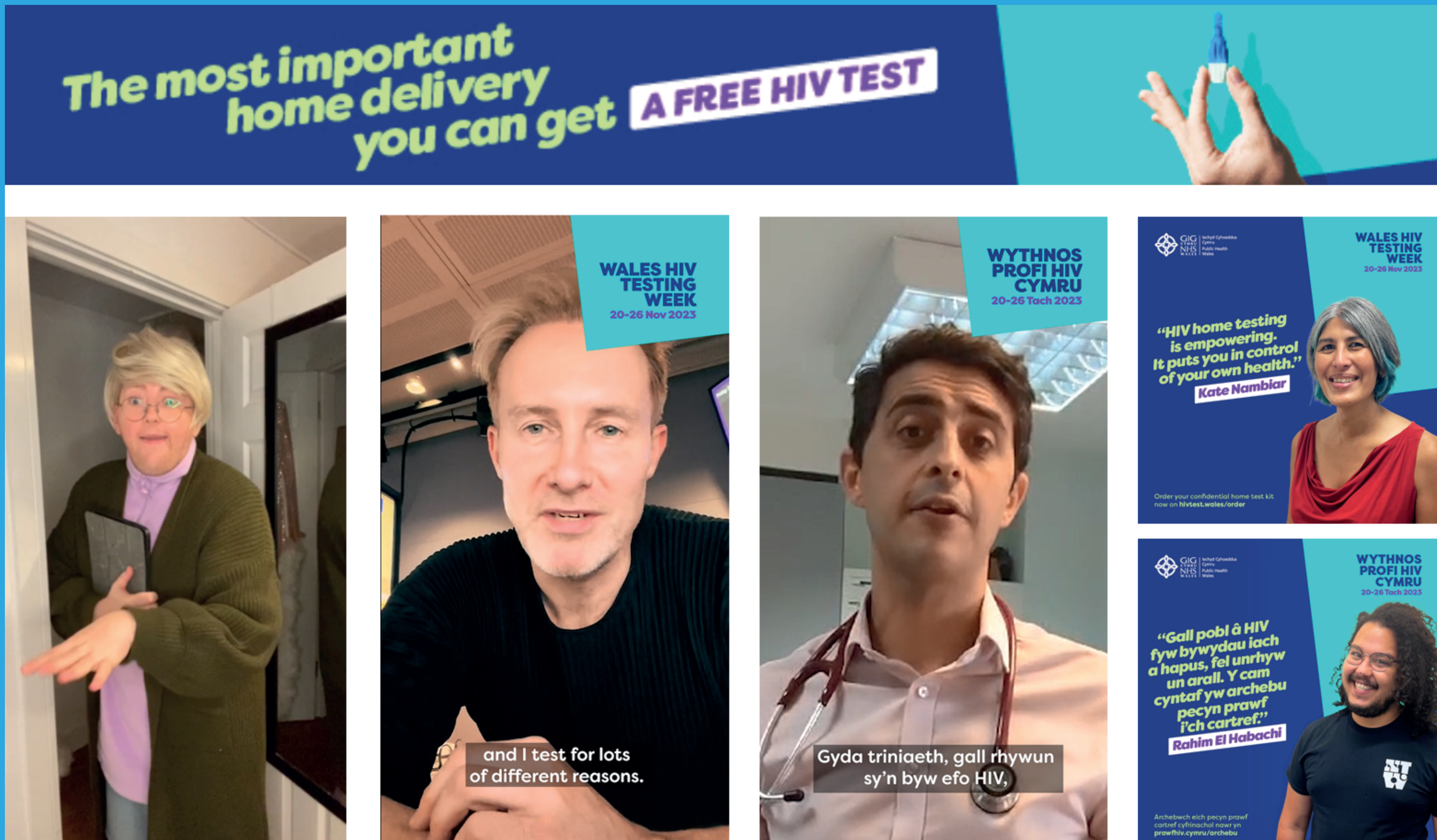
Conclusion:

The combination of public health resources, with the knowledge and experiences of community groups across Wales, has resulted in an **unprecedented level of online reach** and impressions in Wales:

- The addition of **programmatic display ads and paid influencers** significantly expanded the campaign’s reach.
- **Community-led and Welsh-specific content continued to generate high levels of engagement** and we believe a grassroots approach is more effective than adapting or duplicating resources from outside Wales.
- However, this did not directly translate into a correlated increase of clicks and tests ordered from online services. Instead, it was observed that a “soft cap” of c.9,000 test kits were ordered online, broadly similar to the previous year.
- A framework for pre- and post- campaign evaluations could help measure impact on society.

Widening uptake of HIV testing in Wales

- on Twitter/X, impressions increased from 61k in 2022 to **c.1.3 million in 2023**
- via Meta Ads campaign from 46k in 2022 to **c.1.1 million in 2023**.



Acknowledgments:

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