

Improving access to health care: A nurse and health worker led model of HCV testing at Community Corrections

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Background: In 2021 a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between Queensland Health and Queensland Corrective Services (QCS) to provide hepatitis C (HCV) testing clinics at community corrections offices, with the aim of improving the health and wellbeing of people under QCS supervision and the wider community. In 2022 a local agreement was established between Cairns District Community Corrections and Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service for a weekly HCV testing clinic.

Methods: A nurse and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker led clinic was established for 4 hours weekly for 12 months. The clinic delivered rapid point of care (POC) HCV RNA testing utilising \$20 cash incentives. Services were conducted at the Cairns District office, with additional clinics at Innisfail and Mareeba during the 12 months.

Results: From August 2022 to August 2023, 277 clients were seen with 96.0% (266/277) receiving a POC HCV RNA test. Among those tested: median age was 35 years, majority were male (74% 197/266) and 18% (549/265) were experiencing housing instability. 68% (180/263) clients were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. 46% (116/253) had a history of HCV testing with 9.5% (24/253) unsure whether they had been previously tested. 83% of clients (218/264) were new clients to the Cairns Sexual Health Service and 45% (113/253) had never tested for HCV before there. 7 clients were RNA positive (2.6%, 7/266). 4 commenced treatment with SVR recorded (57%) and one spontaneously cleared. Of those RNA positive, 3/7 were new clients and 6/7 had previously been tested.

Conclusions: There was very good engagement with a nurse and Health Worker led clinic at Community Corrections in Cairns which has enabled access to HCV POC testing for at-risk clients. The incentive was well received and PCR positivity was low, potentially reflecting good treatment access within the prison system.

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