

AN UPDATE TO THE DRIED BLOOD SPOT (DBS) PILOT – EQUITABLE ACCESS TO HIV TESTING

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Background: The Dried Blood Spot (DBS) testing pilot is an innovative finger-prick test for HIV and hepatitis C which provides a unique tool in achieving virtual HIV and hepatitis C elimination in NSW. The pilot commenced in 2016 to increase HIV testing among men who have sex with men and people from high prevalence countries. In September 2017, the Pilot was expanded to include HCV RNA testing for Aboriginal people and people who have ever injected drugs. DBS was added to the mix of options in NSW to increase testing and treatment for people who experience barriers to accessing conventional testing services.

Approach: DBS reduces barriers to conventional testing methods with a free self-sampled test that can be done at home or through targeted sites including drug and alcohol services; needle and syringe program sites; outreach and community health services. Test cards can be posted to the laboratory for testing, and results are delivered by SHIL or staff at participating sites. Enabling individuals to access a free and private test supports equitable access with a focus on people who test infrequently or have never tested before.

Outcomes: Between November 2016 and March 2018, there were 2432 registrations for HIV DBS tests 45 per cent indicated they had never been tested for HIV or had not tested in the previous two years. There were seven reactive HIV results that did not previously know their HIV status and all patients were linked into care.

Innovation and Significance: The DBS pilot will be modified in response to increasing HIV notifications among non-Australian born MSM and late diagnoses among heterosexual MSM by simplifying the registration process, expanding the eligibility criteria and translating the website into more languages. This will improve access to testing for CALD communities and people who test infrequently.

Disclosure of Interest Statement : NSW Health funds St Vincent's Laboratory and SHIL to run the DBS pilot. NSW Health does not receive funding from pharmaceutical companies for HIV or hepatitis C therapies.