

HEPATITIS B COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS: DANCING WITH CINDERELLA

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Background/Approach:

Hepatitis B could be considered Australia's 'Cinderella Virus' - still oppressed and waiting for the attention it deserves. Compared with HIV and HCV, the foundational work of partnership-building and community engagement necessary to bring the hepatitis B epidemic out of the shadows is only just beginning. Against this backdrop, Hepatitis Australia's *Hepatitis B Community Education Project* (HBCEP) has provided forty partnership grants across Australia to support local hepatitis organisations to work with community partners to deliver hepatitis B education to priority populations.

Analysis/Argument:

Acknowledging limited opportunities for workforce development, a mid-term National Symposium was convened in 2017 to bring together hepatitis organisations and their partners to review progress of the forty hepatitis B projects underway. Opportunities were provided for project workers to showcase projects, discuss challenges and successes and seek feedback from people with lived experience of hepatitis B and experts in public health, research, policy, and communications.

Outcome/Results:

Despite diverse approaches to engagement across the priority populations, a series of critical success factors and common challenges emerged. The commentary and wisdom from project workers, other experts, and those affected by hepatitis B, combined to provide a rich tapestry of insights. Attendees celebrated successes and collaboratively generated ideas to refine projects, noting the difficult task of telling the hepatitis B story in ways that are culturally appropriate, non-stigmatising and empowering for the affected community. By the end of the Symposium, it was evident a community of practice⁽¹⁾ had been born and everyone was hungry for more.

Conclusions/Applications:

Hepatitis Australia is exploring the establishment of a long-term national Hepatitis B community of practice to support those with a shared interest in community education to collaborate, learn from each other, and continually improve the practice of community engagement and education, to ensure no one with hepatitis B is left behind.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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¹ *A community of practice is a group of people with a shared interest and skill-set, who collaborate over an extended period of time to learn from each other and improve individual practice.*