

# **ELIMINATION OF HEPATITIS C IN NSW PRISONS: POSSIBLE OR POINTLESS? THE EXPERIENCE OF JUSTICE HEALTH & FORENSIC MENTAL HEALTH NETWORK TWO YEARS AFTER THE INTRODUCTION OF NEW CURATIVE TREATMENTS**

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## **Background:**

Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) prevalence in NSW prisons is significantly higher than in the community, with some studies showing up to 30% - 50% of people in custody living with HCV, compared to 1% in the community.

In 2016, Justice Health & Forensic Mental Health Network (the Network) began rolling out the new medications for HCV. Given the high risk of reinfection in the custodial setting, it was recognised that suitably sized correctional centres could be targeted to achieve virtual HCV elimination. In October 2016, a successful elimination project was piloted and evaluated at the Compulsory Drug Treatment Program (CDTP).

## **Analysis:**

Following the successful pilot at the CDTP, the state-wide 'Hepatitis in Prisons Elimination' (HIPE) Program was launched in July 2017, including identification of a further 12 centres for virtual elimination.

The HIPE concept includes broad screening, health promotion, scale-up of treatment, harm minimisation, and ongoing review of new admissions. Partnerships between the Network, Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW) and other key stakeholders facilitate this process.

## **Results:**

To-date, virtual HCV elimination has been achieved in the CDTP, Emu Plains and Berrima. Across the three centres, 298 patients were tested and 69 patients were living with HCV. Of these 69, 73% (n=50) patients were treated, 26% (n=18) were released prior to initiating treatment and connected into care, and 1% (n=1) were pregnant and scheduled for follow up. In addition, Kirkconnell Correctional Centre has undergone the HIPE program and is nearing virtual elimination.

## **Conclusions:**

Notably, treatment numbers in the NSW community in 2018 are declining compared to 2017. The continued scale up of treatment in NSW prisons where there is regular throughput of target population groups will ultimately drive down the pool of infection, significantly contributing to the public health of the broader population and the ambitious goal of HCV elimination in Australia by 2028.

## **Disclosure of Interest Statement:**

The Network recognises the considerable contribution that industry partners make to professional and research activities. We also recognise the need for transparency of disclosure of potential conflicts of interest by acknowledging these relationships in publications and presentations.

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