

Nurse-led hepatitis C RNA point-of-care testing and financial incentives in community settings in regional Victoria, Australia: an implementation study

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Background: Increased hepatitis C virus (HCV) testing is required to achieve World Health Organization elimination targets, and simplifying diagnosis is key. This study assessed the care cascade of a nurse-led HCV RNA point-of-care (POC) testing and financial incentive program in community-based settings in Barwon South West, Victoria.

Methods: A viral hepatitis nurse visited community-based services to provide HCV testing and treatment as standard of care. Between August 2023 and July 2025, HCV RNA POC testing was offered to people who inject drugs who had not had a complete test event (defined as an HCV RNA test or a negative HCV antibody test) in the previous six months. A \$20 AUD incentive was offered at different stages of the care cascade.

Results: Seven community-based sites participated: one needle and syringe program, two drug and alcohol services, one community health centre, two pharmacies and one homelessness service. Overall, 144 HCV RNA POC tests were performed on 142 people. Fifteen (11%) participants reported no prior HCV testing, including 10 who had injected drugs in the past six months. For 27 (19%) participants, it was their first test to determine the outcome of prior hepatitis C treatment; 24/27 (89%) were cured and 3/27 (11%) were not. Seventeen (12%) participants had HCV RNA detected; 10/17 (59%) were new diagnoses and 7/17 (41%) had not had a complete test event previously. Of participants with HCV RNA detected, 13/17 (76%) started treatment. Of 13 that started treatment, 10 (77%) were assessed for treatment outcome and 9/10 (90%) were cured.

Conclusions: This two-year program reached previously untested people, provided treatment outcomes, identified an RNA prevalence of 12%, and had a high treatment uptake rate. These findings underscore the importance of POC testing, embedding testing in accessible community-based locations, and the role of nurses in providing programs in Victoria.

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