Hepatitis C testing and treatment motivations for First Nations communities

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Background: First Nations people have a higher prevalence of hepatitis C virus (HCV), are at higher risk of HCV and experience greater barriers to accessing services. Encouraging and supporting First Nations communities to undertake testing and treatment for HCV is critical to improve health outcomes.

Analysis: Hepatitis NSW (HNSW) partnered with members of the HIV/Hepatitis and Related Programs Aboriginal Health Workers Network (HAHN) in 2024 to design and run a community engagement and consultation project that identified drivers and motivators of First Nations peoples to undertake testing for, and treatment of, HCV. The project also measured the accessibility, relatability, and appropriateness of the messaging and imagery of the NSW hepatitis C health campaign HEP CURED.

Outcome: Face-to face focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and an online survey were used to engage with 105 First Nations people across NSW. The feedback gained provided useful insight into the knowledge, beliefs, motivations and attitudes to HCV from community respondents. Outcomes from the project are also helping to form the basis for the development, in 2025, of a First Nations HCV health promotion campaign.

General HCV knowledge was broadly strong, although there were some notable weak areas. Individual risk of exposure varied on the cohort consulted, which included people who inject drugs and those previously incarcerated. Approximately 50% of respondents had previously tested for HCV.

Conclusions: In understanding barriers to HCV testing and treatment, “shame” and “confidentiality” were identified as primary roadblocks. While a majority of regional respondents visited and trusted their local Aboriginal health service, there were still many who did not. While education, information, and discussion were all seen as means to remove or reduce shame as a hurdle, building trust is a larger issue.

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