

The evolving hepatitis C landscape – findings from stakeholder consultations for the 2026-28 New South Wales Hepatitis C Strategy

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Background/Approach:

The NSW Hepatitis C (HCV) Strategy provides the strategic framework for service delivery and program development with the goal of eliminating HCV as a public health concern by 2028. Research indicates that testing and treatment needs to increase to achieve this ambitious target. As part of redeveloping the Strategy, NSW Health undertook a comprehensive consultation process to ensure the Strategy reflects the current landscape, emerging challenges and needs of priority populations.

Analysis/Argument:

Consultation was conducted through three key activities. Online focus groups were held with priority populations (people who inject drugs, people with a history of incarceration, Aboriginal people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and sex workers) to understand the perspectives of populations impacted by or at risk of HCV. An online sector-wide survey collected qualitative and quantitative feedback on draft targets and focus areas. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews with HCV experts explored system-level barriers and enablers to elimination. Qualitative data were coded and analysed thematically.

Outcome/Results:

Participants included focus group participants (n=29), survey respondents (n=84), and expert interviewees (n=10). Across stakeholder groups, there was strong consensus that the HCV landscape is changing as NSW approaches elimination. Participants highlighted diminishing caseloads, increased complexity of cases and changes in the Needle and Syringe Program cohort. Key priorities for the redesigned Strategy included a focus on improving access to treatment, strengthening responses in custodial settings, and reducing stigma and discrimination as a barrier to care. Participants emphasised the need for regionally tailored approaches and highlighted opportunities to enhance the peer workforce, build capacity of the health workforce and strengthen models of care.

Conclusions/Applications: The consultation findings were critical in informing and shaping the redevelopment of the NSW HCV Strategy. They highlight the changing hepatitis C landscape and reveal several key focus areas to achieve elimination by 2028.

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