

A collaborative approach to hepatitis C healthcare delivery. An outreach and residential in-reach model

Watkinson Sally¹, Adamson E⁴, Cowie B⁶, Beath J³, Lenzie-Smith K⁵, Pearson M¹, Abbott M¹, Callus A², Ryan L², Dicka J².

¹Integrated Hepatitis C Service (IHCS), Royal Melbourne Hospital, Melbourne, Australia

²Harm Reduction Victoria (HRVic), Melbourne, Australia

³Flagstaff and The Open Door, The Salvation Army Australia Territory, Melbourne, Australia

⁴ The Burnet Institute, Melbourne Australia

⁵ Centre for Nursing Inquiry, Royal Melbourne Hospital, Melbourne, Australia

⁶Victorian Infectious Diseases Service, The Doherty Institute, Melbourne Australia

Background:

People who use drugs or experience homelessness face inequity in accessing healthcare, including for hepatitis C. This leads to missed opportunities to diagnose and treat hepatitis C, contributing to avoidable late diagnosis and poor health outcomes.

Approach:

Multidisciplinary, collaborative and adaptive models of care can enhance delivery of person-centred care outside of traditional clinical settings. A peer/nurse-led program at the Royal Melbourne Hospital worked collaboratively to provide two service models to increase hepatitis C diagnosis and treatment in people who inject drugs and/or experience homelessness. A weekly outreach service was implemented in St Albans, western Melbourne, with care delivered from a vehicle to the local community. Harm Reduction Victoria (HRVic) supported the involvement of peer workers with lived experience of hepatitis C and drug use known within the community of focus, to build trust and link people to the service.

An in-reach service was implemented at two residential homeless persons services in inner Melbourne. A weekly liver health clinic was provided in partnership with HRVic and the Salvation Army, Community of Support team, who each supported residents to access screening and care.

Outcome:

Treatment was commenced in 30 individuals (94% of prescriptions provided), during the St Albans project. In the residential settings, prevalence was lower, however treatment was commenced in four residents (80% of prescriptions provided).

Conclusions:

Collaborative multi-agency, cross-disciplinary projects can enhance flexible health care delivery by interrupting the cycle of missed opportunities for hepatitis C elimination. Numerous participants had previously attended nearby hospitals on multiple occasions but had not been diagnosed with hepatitis C or offered treatment.

Peer worker integration was critical in enhancing service engagement in combination with delivering care in acceptable and convenient settings for the community of focus. This presents an important insight as Australia advances towards hepatitis C elimination.