

QulHN Hep C testing and treatment clinics: Going viral across Queensland

Authors:

Leyden E¹, Kvassay A¹, Grimstrup D¹, Thompson H¹, Osborne S¹, Kuhn B¹, Fenech M¹, Ogwang T¹, Alexander N¹, QulHN Harm Reduction Team²

¹Queensland Injectors Health Network (QulHN)

²The QulHN Harm Reduction Team comprises of peer and harm reduction staff, and Nurse Practitioners living and working across Queensland from Townsville to South-East Queensland.

Background/Approach:

Queensland Injectors Health Network (QulHN) is a non-government peak organisation providing harm reduction, therapeutic and GP alcohol and drug services to people who inject drugs in Queensland. Since 2016, QulHN have run an HCV specialist harm reduction, peer case management, nurse practitioner-led fixed-site and outreach clinics, including incentives, HCV prison linkage (2019), and in 2021 HCV point-of-care testing (POCT), to lead HCV elimination efforts for people who inject drugs (PWID) in Queensland. In 2023, services expanded to targeted regional remote Queensland.

Analysis/Argument:

Provision of harm reduction focussed services by a widely respected interdisciplinary team of peers, harm reduction workers, and Nurse Practitioners is vital to garnering and sustaining client engagement with QulHN. This, in conjunction with expanding outreach access to regional remote communities, is central to increased reach with priority populations for HCV prevention, testing and treatment.

Outcome/Results:

Expanding access to regional remote along with POCT implementation increased access to testing and treatment. Service data clearly indicates HCV testing numbers increased with the introduction of HCV POCT in 2021:

Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Test Numbers	760	656	892	1727	1531	1307

With increased testing rates, HCV detections have decreased to 8.7% at the end of 2024. Annual treatment commencement numbers have remained stable from 2019, averaging 91/year confirming treatment commencement (range 71-125). SVR testing conducted with 65.4% of those treated has resulted in 96.3% of people tested achieving HCV cure. From 2016, the implementation of peer, harm reduction and Nurse Practitioner led strategies demonstrated over 1,000 HCV treatment commencements.

Conclusions/Applications:

QulHN's multidisciplinary team focusing on the strengths of peer and harm reduction case management, in close collaboration with Nurse Practitioners, providing outreach across multiple communities in Queensland has demonstrated the positive impact of improved access and equity to Hepatitis testing and treatment.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

QulHN Hepatitis C testing and Treatment Management Program is funded by the Communicable Diseases Branch, Department of Health. QulHN has received

support for regional and remote clinics from Eliminate C Australia and Gilead Sciences towards travel and accommodation.

Some of the HCV Point of Care Testing supplies were provided through the Australian Hepatitis C Point of Care Testing Program, sponsored by The Kirby Institute, UNSW, and funded through the Department of Health and Aged Care, NSW Health, the National Health and Medical Research Council, Medical Research Future Fund, Cepheid, Gilead Sciences, and AbbVie. The contents of the published material are solely the responsibility of the individual authors and do not reflect the views of the Kirby Institute, NHMRC or the Australian State and Commonwealth Governments.