

Destination micro-elimination: Hepatitis C point-of-care testing uptake in Barwon South West

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Background: More hepatitis C testing is required to achieve elimination targets, and simplifying the diagnosis is key. Barwon South West (BSW) in regional Victoria, population 459,879 people, is aiming for hepatitis C elimination. Western Victoria, which includes BSW, was the only Primary Health Network to achieve the 2022 National Strategy treatment target. This study aimed to assess the care cascade of a hepatitis C point of care (POC) RNA test and incentive program.

Methods: The viral hepatitis outreach nurse visits primary care services providing testing, treatment and support to clinicians. Hepatitis C RNA POC testing was offered to people who inject drugs and had not had a complete test event (HCV RNA test or negative antibody) in the previous six months. Venepuncture for treatment work up was associated with provision of a \$20 incentive. Study outcomes include the care cascade - here we present preliminary findings.

Results: The study commenced in August 2023 - three sites have been recruited. 97 people have received POC testing; 75/96 (78%) reported injecting in the last six months; 49/94 (52%) reported prior hepatitis C treatment. 7/94 (7%) reported no prior test – four were people who inject currently. For 18 people it was their first test to follow-up prior treatment; 15/18 were cured (range 5 – 488 weeks post-treatment), 3/18 were not (range 4 – 7 years post-treatment). 13/96 (14%) people had RNA detected, indicating current infection. 5/13 (38%) had not had a complete test event previously. To date, 9/13 (69%) have commenced treatment.

Conclusion: POC testing identified an RNA prevalence of 14% - of whom 38% (5/13) had not had a complete test event previously. These data provide evidence of the need to screen and rescreen individuals at risk of infection and link to care in order to achieve elimination.

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