From research to routine – the journey of Dried Blood Spot testing for hepatitis C in New South Wales.

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Background: Achieving hepatitis C virus (HCV) elimination requires innovative strategies to reach higher-risk populations who experience barriers to testing. Dried Blood Spot (DBS) testing offers a simple, low-barrier approach for HCV antibody and RNA detection. Following completion of the NSW validation study and application to the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA), a clear pathway was established to embed DBS HCV testing into clinical practice and support progress towards elimination.

Analysis: The NSW Ministry of Health undertook a coordinated statewide collaborative implementation process to operationalise DBS testing. Key enablers included aligning policy settings, upgrading electronic medical record and pathology systems, developing standardised clinical workflows, and supporting service providers to integrate DBS into models of care.

Outcome: A suite of implementation resources was co-designed with service providers, including statewide guidance, collection instructions, online training modules, competency-based practical assessment tools, drug and alcohol service guidelines and communication assets. Pathology ordering pathways and IT systems were enhanced to integrate DBS HCV testing into routine pathology. Engagement with frontline services ensured resources were practical, acceptable, and responsive to diverse environments, including non-clinical settings and outreach.

Conclusion: Once assays are TGA-licensed, NSW will be the first state in Australia to implement DBS HCV testing at a statewide scale. Efficacy will be measured and utility assessed using incident and population data, as well as assay continuous assessment. Embedding DBS HCV testing into clinical care enhances access to HCV testing for populations at increased risk. By removing the research-related constraints and building consistent statewide systems, DBS testing can now be delivered at even greater scale-up, and support NSW's progress towards HCV elimination.

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