

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

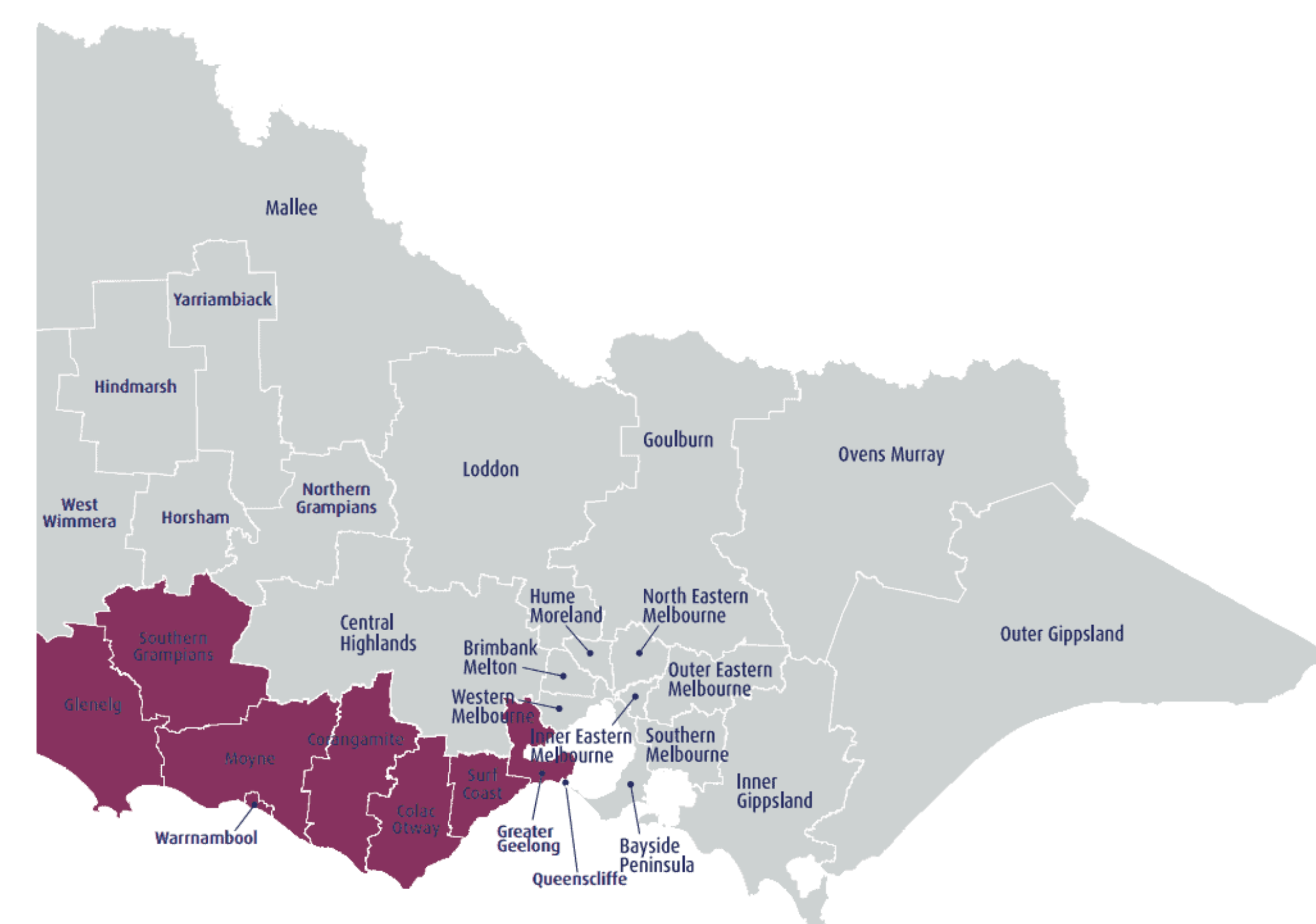


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1 Background

- The Barwon South West region, situated in Western Victoria (which also includes Grampians), spans from Geelong to the South Australian border.
- With a population of 453,569, the Barwon South West region is aiming for hepatitis C micro-elimination.
- Western Victoria has the highest treatment uptake nationally [1].
- Despite this achievement, the region has experienced a stark decline in treatment uptake [2].
- More testing is required to achieve elimination targets, and simplifying the diagnostic pathway is key.



2 Aim

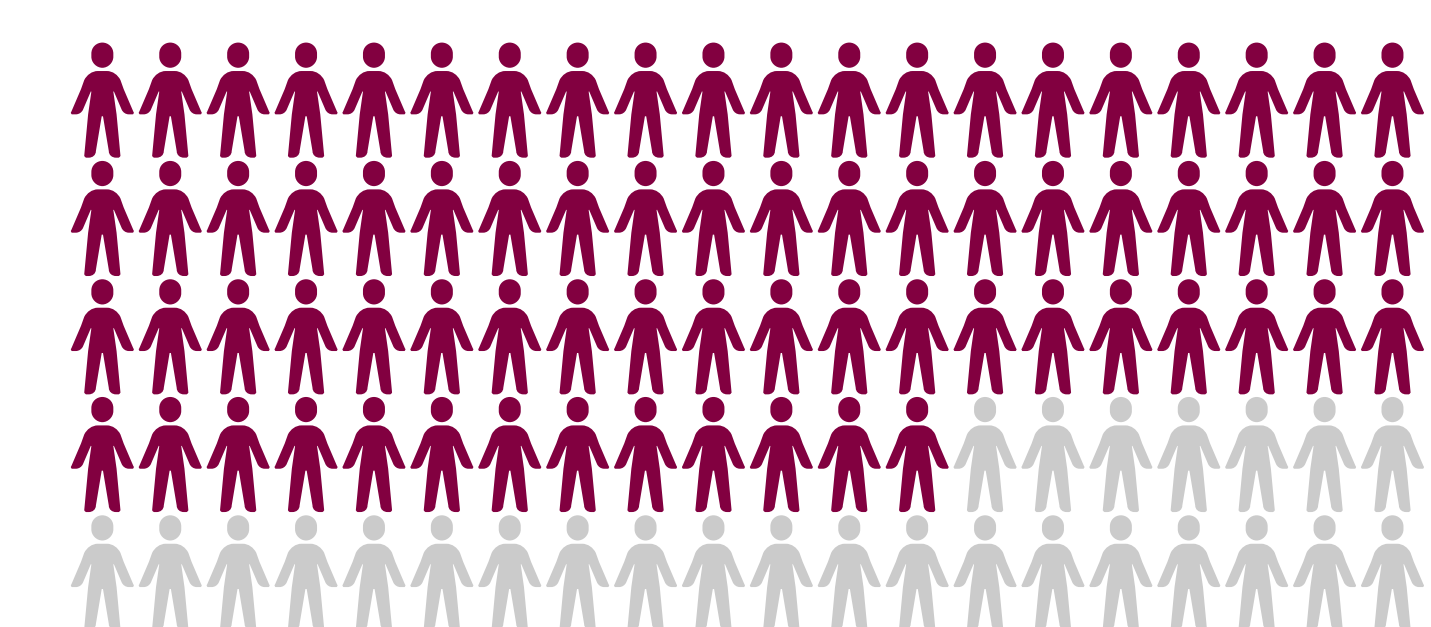
This study aimed to assess the care cascade of a hepatitis C RNA point-of-care (POC) testing and financial incentive program in the Barwon South West, a region with high treatment uptake.

3 Methods

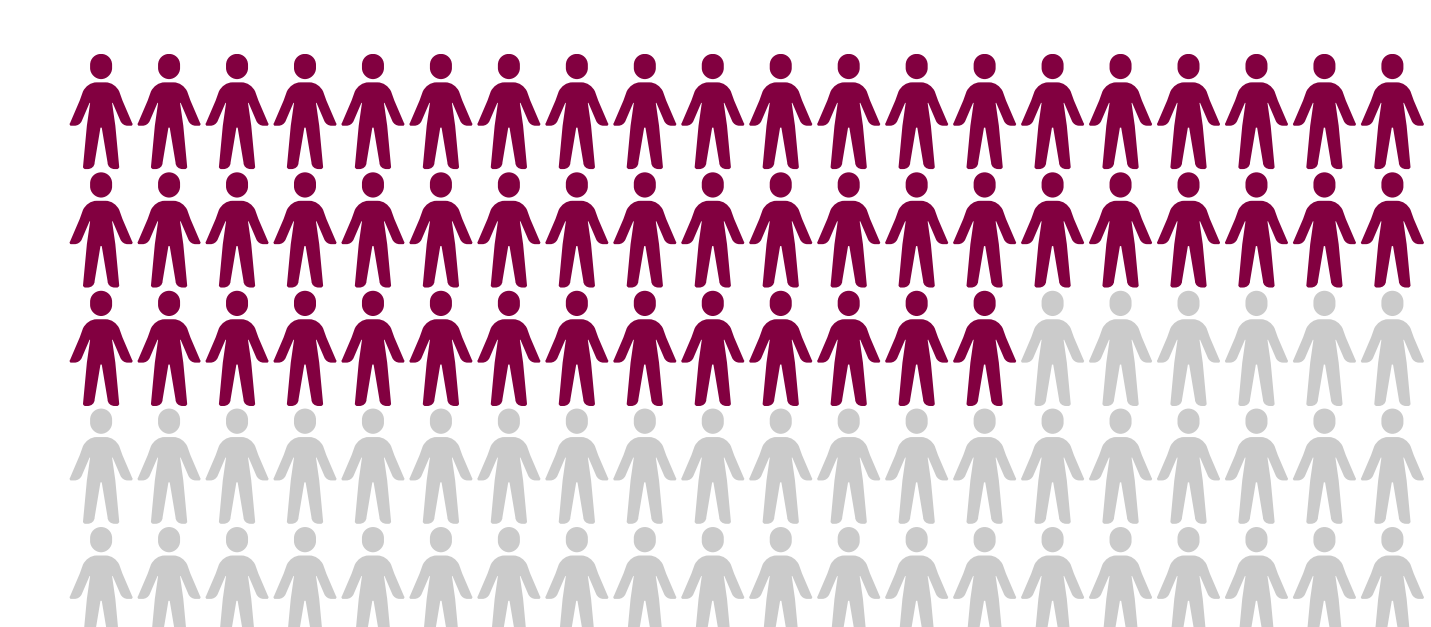
- The viral hepatitis outreach nurse visits primary care services throughout the region, providing testing, treatment, and support to clinicians.
- Hepatitis C RNA POC testing was offered to people who inject drugs and had not had a complete test event (HCV RNA test or negative HCV antibody) in the previous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

4 Results

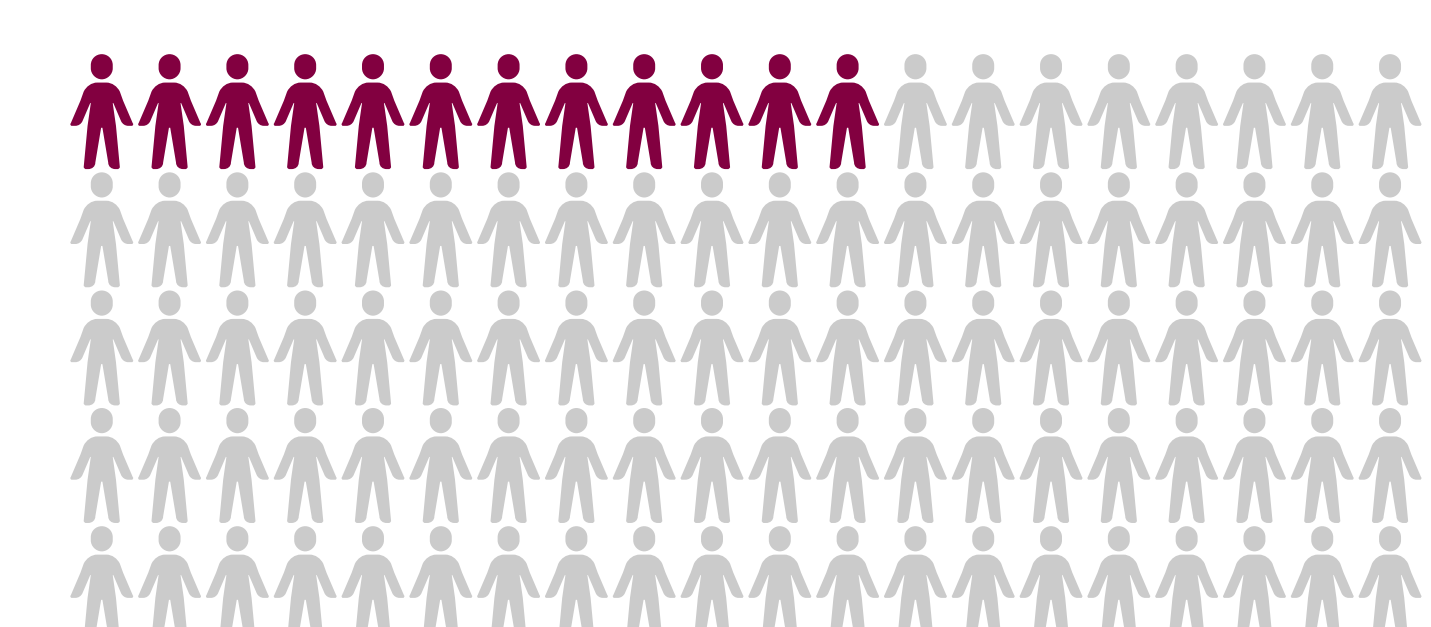
- The study commenced in August 2023 and is currently ongoing.
- Six sites have been recruited including a needle and syringe program, two drug and alcohol services, a community health centre and two pharmacies.
- 111 people have received HCV RNA POC testing:
 - 80/109 (73%) reported injecting in the last six months
 - 57/106 (54%) reported prior hepatitis C treatment
 - 8/103 (8%) reported no prior test, including four people who currently inject drugs
 - For 18 people, it was their first test to follow up on prior treatment:
 - 15/18 were cured (range 5 – 488 weeks post-treatment)
 - 3/18 were not cured (range 4 – 7 years post-treatment)
- 13/111 (12%) people had HCV RNA detected, indicating current infection:
 - 5/13 (38%) had not had a complete test event previously
 - To date:
 - 10/13 (77%) have initiated treatment
 - 6/10 (60%) have completed treatment
 - 2/6 (33%) have achieved sustained virological response (SVR)



80/109 (73%) people reported injecting in the last six months



57/106 (54%) people reported prior hepatitis C treatment



13/111 (12%) people had HCV RNA detected



5 Conclusion

- Hepatitis C POC testing identified an RNA prevalence of 12%.
 - 38% (5/13) of these individuals had not had a complete test event previously.
- These data highlight the need to screen and rescreen individuals at risk of infection.
- Linking individuals to care is crucial to achieve hepatitis C elimination.

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References

- [1] MacLachlan JH, Purcell I, Romero N, Cowie BC (2024). Viral Hepatitis Mapping Project: Hepatitis C National Report 2021–2023. Australasian Society for HIV, and Sexual Health Medicine (ASHM). <https://ashm.org.au/vh-mapping-project/>
- [2] MacLachlan, JH, Stewart, S, & Cowie, BC. (2021). Viral Hepatitis Mapping Project: National Report 2020. Australasian Society for HIV, and Sexual Health Medicine (ASHM). <https://www.ashm.org.au/programs/Viral-Hepatitis-Mapping-Project/>