

Entrypoint: Increasing Hepatitis C Testing And Treatment Among Sexually Adventurous Men Who Have Sex With Men

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Background: Recent epidemiological modelling suggests that Australia could eradicate hepatitis C by 2026, as a result of the widespread availability of new antiviral treatments. Specific public health campaigns targeting HIV-positive men who have sex with men (MSM) for new hepatitis C treatments, however, have been rare—even though hepatitis C incidence is *increasing* among HIV-positive MSM globally. This study investigated ways to increase hepatitis C testing and treatment among MSM, and thereby prevent onward transmission.

Methods: Quantitative data investigating knowledge, attitudes and practices related to hepatitis C were collected from 179 men through a national online survey. Additional qualitative data were collected from HIV-positive men through interviews and peer-based ethnography in Sydney and Melbourne.

Results: Of the 179 MSM, 34% identified that they were HIV positive; 19% had a past or current hepatitis C infection and 28% had a history of injecting drug use. Among participants in qualitative arm most reported an absence of discussion around hepatitis C among men within their sexual networks. In contrast, information sharing around drugs and HIV was common. Few were able to recall any health promotion messaging about hepatitis C specifically targeting gay sex and drug contexts. Areas where knowledge could be increased were: risk of contracting hepatitis C—especially sexual transmission—if already living with HIV; and likelihood of more rapid disease progression if co-infected with both HIV and hepatitis C. Participants were also uncertain about whether they were tested for hepatitis C as part of regular HIV monitoring, the risk of reinfection after treatment, and of onward transmission when taking hepatitis C treatment.

Conclusion: Our research suggests that there is a need for education that specifically addresses hepatitis C in the context of gay sex and drug use scenes. The informational networks already present within these scenes could provide opportunities for promoting testing and treatment.

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