

## **BREAKING BARRIERS: RIVER STONE'S ADVOCACY FOR ENHANCED HCV CARE IN NEW BRUNSWICK**

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### **Background:**

River Stone Recovery Centre (RSRC) has been at the forefront of efforts to reduce policy barriers related to HCV care in New Brunswick. Recognizing the challenges faced by individuals accessing care, we have actively engaged in advocacy and policy change initiatives to improve the landscape of HCV treatment and management. Efforts have focused on working towards same-day treatment starts, eliminating unnecessary requirements for DAA treatment initiation, and implementing innovative testing and treatment approaches.

### **Description of intervention:**

RSRC has been conducting dried blood spot testing (DBST) training in diverse settings, including Indigenous communities, and collaborating with other healthcare workers. Involvement in Action Hepatitis Canada (AHC) and subsequent placement on the steering committee has allowed us to contribute to national advocacy efforts and policy discussions, amplifying the impact beyond New Brunswick.

### **Effectiveness:**

HCV advocacy efforts have resulted in significant policy changes within our provincial government, such as the elimination of genotyping and fibrosis score requirements for treatment-naïve individuals without signs of decompensated cirrhosis, which took effect in February 2024. RSRC has also secured a GeneXpert machine through Health Canada's Special Access Program, allowing for same-day HCV treatment starts and eliminating months to years of treatment delay.

### **Conclusion and next steps:**

Next steps include rolling out GeneXpert programming for same-day treatment starts, continuing to support Indigenous, and rural communities with DBS and nurse-led HCV programming, and educating community partners about policy changes and nurse-led HCV treatment. The proactive approach to policy advocacy has made a tangible impact on HCV care in New Brunswick, and their ongoing efforts are poised to further improve access and outcomes for affected individuals.

### **Disclosure of Interest Statement:**