

# A community-based program to increase diagnosis and treatment for HCV infection among high-risk people who inject drugs in Thessaloniki, Greece (ALEXANDROS PROGRAM).

Sypsa V<sup>1</sup>, Roussos S<sup>1</sup>, Tsirogianni E<sup>2,3</sup>, Trafali D<sup>4</sup>, Tsiagka D<sup>4</sup>, Gavalaki A<sup>4</sup>, Papanikolaou Z<sup>4</sup>, Papagiouvani I<sup>2,4</sup>, Tampaki A<sup>4</sup>, Tsiara C<sup>5</sup>, Paraskeva D<sup>5</sup>, Paraskevis D<sup>1</sup>, Kalamitsis G<sup>6</sup>, Goulis I<sup>2</sup>, Hatzakis A<sup>1,4</sup>

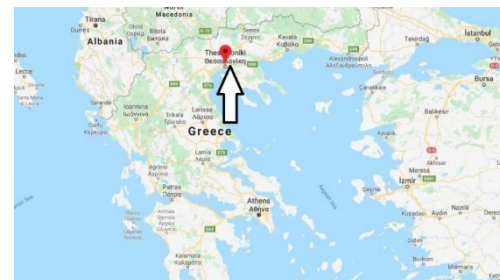
<sup>1</sup>Dept. of Hygiene, Epidemiology and Medical Statistics, Medical School, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece, <sup>2</sup>Hippokratio Hospital, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki, <sup>3</sup>Greek Organisation Against Drugs (OKANA), Athens, Greece, <sup>4</sup>Hellenic Scientific Society for the Study of AIDS Sexually Transmitted and Emerging Diseases, Athens, Greece, <sup>5</sup>National Public Health Organization, <sup>6</sup>Hellenic Liver Patients Association "Prometheus", Greece.

# Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge and thank the people who inject drugs who trusted the program ALEXANDROS and have generously participated in this research

# Background & aim

**Thessaloniki:** the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest city in Greece



- Approximately 1,200 people with high risk drug use
- HCV prevalence among persons accessing drug treatment programs in 2018: 58%
- Low coverage of needle and syringe programs (NSP): 1 syringe/PWID/year in 2016

## **Aim:**

**To increase** diagnosis of HCV infection, linkage and retention to HCV care/treatment in the population of People Who Inject Drugs (PWID) in Thessaloniki

# Challenges

1

Reaching a hard-to-reach population  
High coverage - Reach those in most need  
(active PWID, not linked to other services)

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2

Linkage to HCV care

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3

Retention in HCV treatment

# Addressing these challenges in Thessaloniki, Greece

## ALEXANDROS program

### **Duration of the program:**

September 2019-July 2021 (two lockdowns due to COVID-19 during the program)

### **Target population:**

PWID  $\geq 18$  years old living in Thessaloniki

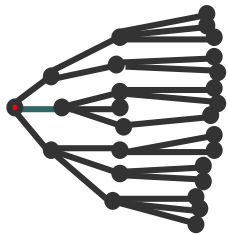
1

# Reaching a hard-to-reach population

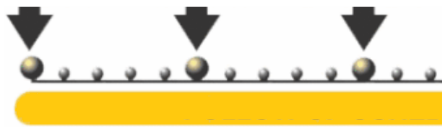
High coverage - Reach those in most need  
(active PWID, not linked to other services)



Community-based (in the centre of Thessaloniki)



Peer-driven recruitment: chain referral from members of the target population (RDS)



Multiple recruitment rounds → PWID have the chance to participate multiple times



Incentives → rapid recruitment, high coverage, reach deep into the network of PWID

# 2

## Linkage to HCV care



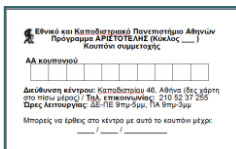
All necessary procedures performed on-site in a single visit



Patients are entered to the national chronic hepatitis C registry for treatment approval



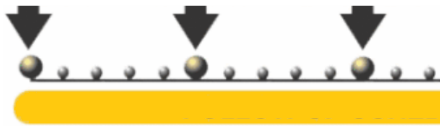
Collaborating clinicians– Peer navigator assists patients



Monetary incentives

# 3

# Retention in HCV treatment



Εθνικό και Καποδιστριακό Πανεπιστήμιο Αθηνών  
Πρόγραμμα ΑΠΕΙΣΟΤΕΛΕΙΑΣ (Κωδικός: \_\_\_\_)  
Κουπόνι ενθάρτυξης

ΑΑ. Κουπόνι: \_\_\_\_\_

Διεύθυνση κέντρου: Καποδιστριαίο 46, Αθήνα (δες χάρτη  
στο πίσω μέρος). Τηλ. επικοινωνίας: 210 52 37 255  
Προς καταχώριση: ΔΕΠ ΠΕ-Εργαστ. ΙΑ Πρωτοβ.

Μπορείς να έρθεις στο κέντρο με αυτό το κουπόνι μέχρι:  
\_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_



Follow-up of patients during treatment

Monetary incentives

Counseling

# Characteristics of ALEXANDROS participants

**1,101** unique participants - **1,775** visits for testing/interviews

**35%** participated in multiple rounds

**54%** active PWID (injection in the past 30 days)

**15%** currently homeless

**80%** not currently linked to opioid substitution treatment programs

**66.6%** had been tested for HCV in the past

**15.7%** of those aware of a positive test had received HCV treatment in the past

# **HCV infection (N=1,101 PWID)**

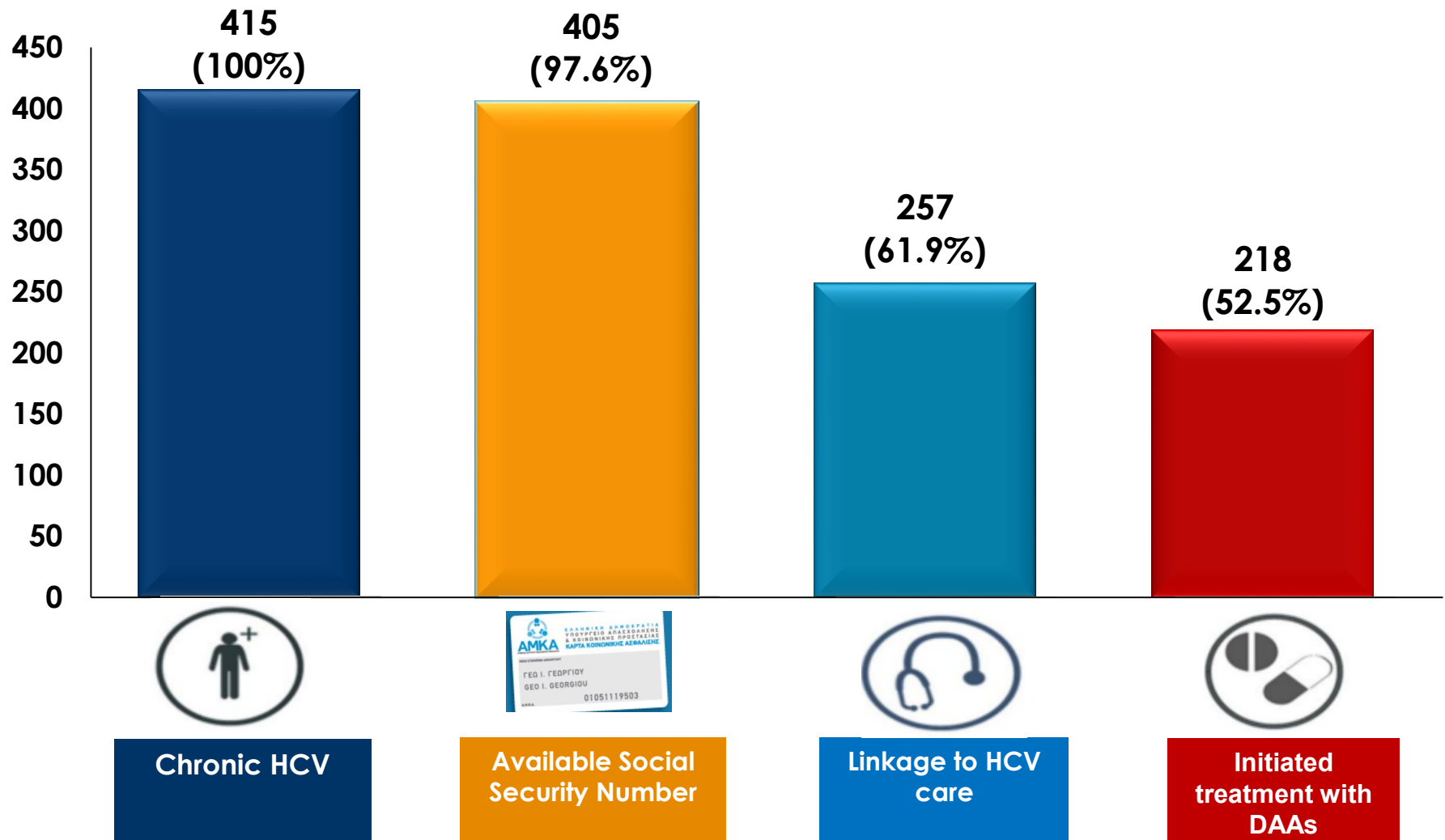
**62.9% anti-HCV(+)** (693/1,101)

**67.6% with chronic HCV** (448/663)

415 with chronic HCV & without HIV

# The impact of ALEXANDROS program: Cascade of HCV care

(for N=415 PWID with HCV mono-infection)



*ongoing linkage to HCV care*

# Discussion

The intervention was successful as it was designed to address the population of PWID:

**Community-based**

**Peer-driven recruitment**

**Testing, linkage and retention to care provided on-site with the help of clinicians and dedicated staff/peer navigators**

ALEXANDROS allowed the early identification of an HIV outbreak among PWID

# Funding & disclosure of interest

- ALEXANDROS program was funded by the Conquering Hepatitis via Micro-Elimination (CHIME) grant, Gilead Sciences.
- Additional support was provided by the Organization Against Drugs (OKANA) and Hellenic Scientific Society for the Study of AIDS, STDs and Emerging Diseases.

VS has received grants by Gilead Sciences and Abbvie