

Strengthening Hepatitis C Treatment Services in New South Wales Alcohol and Other Drug Settings

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Background: The NSW Hepatitis C Strategy 2022 – 2025 [1] identifies alcohol and other drug (AOD) services as key settings for integrating hepatitis C care, with the goal of eliminating hepatitis C as a public health concern in NSW by 2028.

Description of Model of Care/Intervention: NSW Health developed a Hepatitis C Testing and Care in Alcohol and Other Drug Services document [2] to support a consistent approach to routine hepatitis C care, build workforce capacity and strengthen partnerships. A framework within the document guided minimum standards of hepatitis C care tailored to the local context in order to enhance service delivery.

Effectiveness/Acceptability/Implementation: NSW Public AOD services were surveyed to assess hepatitis C care delivery and map service levels. Among 80 services:

- 17 (21%) provided hepatitis C testing, Fibroscan and prescribed direct-acting antiviral treatment together onsite.
- 9 (12%) provided venepuncture and point-of-care testing, but referred to remote/part-time prescribers.
- 12 (15%) provided venepuncture testing but did not have arrangements with a remote prescriber.
- 24 (30%)* offered dried blood spot (DBS) testing only.
- 18 (23%) provided no testing.

Metropolitan services had more higher-level services, although five of the highest-level services were in rural/regional areas. The survey revealed best practices which are being shared to promote system-wide improvement and challenged the misconception that not all AOD services can provide hepatitis C care.

Conclusion and Next Steps: The next phase will prioritise scaling up routine hepatitis C care in all AOD services, establishing DBS as a minimum standard, and mapping AOD non-government organisation services to identify partnership and support opportunities.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Findings will promote adequate hepatitis C care and resources, equitable access regardless of location, and ongoing collaboration to improve service delivery.

** 5 of the 18 are new Substance Use in Pregnancy Services, which are not DBS priorities and require comprehensive antenatal testing.*

References

1. NSW Hepatitis C Strategy 2022 – 2025. Available from:
https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/hepatitis/Pages/hepatitiscstrategy.aspx?gclid=EAlalQobChMInL6k3Pev_wlViFvgCh1CNw38EAAYASAAEgLLSvD_BwE

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2. Hepatitis C Testing and Care in Alcohol and Other Drug Services. Available from:
<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/aod/resources/Pages/hepatitis-c-testing-and-care.aspx>