Factors associated with hepatitis C testing among clients attending Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services in Australia.

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Background: Access to hepatitis C testing is the critical first step in the cascade of care. This study describes factors associated with hepatitis C (HCV) testing among clients attending Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS) in Australia.

Methods: Strategies for hepatitis C testing and treatment in Aboriginal communities that Lead to Elimination (SCALE-C) was a community-based “test and treat” intervention integrating point-of-care HCV testing, non-invasive liver fibrosis assessment, and linkage to care in four ACCHS. At screening, participants completed an HCV risk assessment and bio-behavioural questionnaire, collecting data related to drug use, injecting risk behaviours, access to health care, HCV testing and treatment experiences and preferences. Multivariable Poisson regression models were used to identify factors associated with HCV testing.

Results: Of 228 participants who reported being at risk for HCV in the prior 12 months, 214 (94%) completed the bio-behavioural questionnaire (74% Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander; 26% women; median age 37; 17% HCV RNA positive). Overall, 65% reported having ever had an HCV test, and 39% reported testing in the past year. There was some evidence that participants who reported recently seeing a regular GP (past 6 months) compared to those without a regular GP and participants who reported injecting drugs compared to those who had never injected were more likely to have had a HCV test in the previous 12 months; prevalence ratios and 95% confidence intervals were 1.57 (0.94, 2.72) and 1.58 (0.83-3.42) respectively.

Conclusions: Despite recommendations for annual HCV screening for those at ongoing risk, less than half of SCALE-C participants reported receiving testing in the past year. These results highlight opportunities to improve HCV testing strategies and simplify testing pathways, including point-of-care, to improve access to HCV testing for all individuals at risk.

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