

Declining hepatitis C prevalence among priority populations accessing DBS testing in community and prison settings in NSW

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Acknowledgement of Country

I acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands that we are meeting here today. I pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of NSW.

I also acknowledge and pay my respects to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people/colleagues joining us today.

This artwork, titled Shared Journeys, was created by Charmaine Mumbulla. It features weaving lines of land and waterways found on Country throughout NSW. Together they symbolise connection and togetherness on a shared journey towards sexual health.

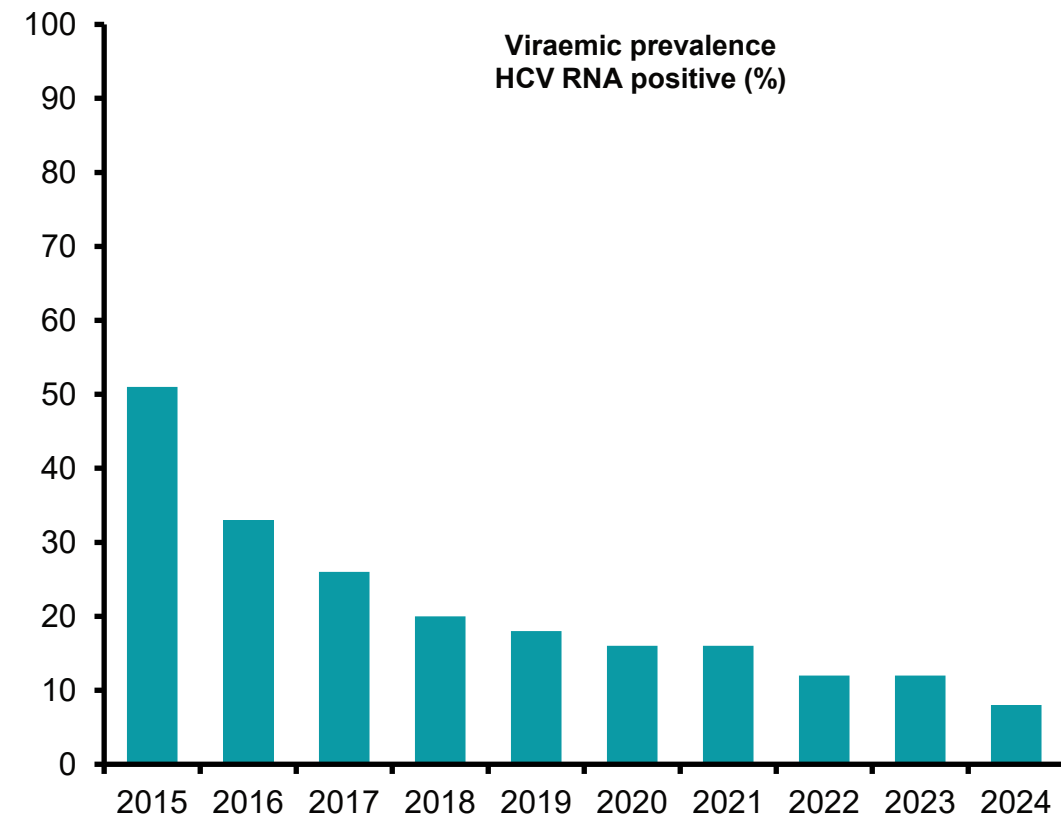
Disclosure of interest



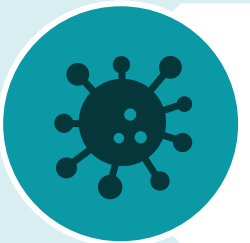
None to declare

Background:

Annual Needle Syringe Program Survey (n = 1,300-2,500)



Substantial progress in reducing hepatitis C prevalence, particularly among people who attend NSPs (1)



Still 62,880 people estimated to be living with hepatitis C in 2023 (2)



Addressing barriers to testing and treatment uptake (e.g. poor venous access, stigma and discrimination or competing priorities)

Dried blood spot (DBS) testing

DBS offers a practical alternative

- Finger-stick sample collection, blood spots dried on DBS card (Whatman protein saver 903)
- Stable at room temperature
- No phlebotomy required
- Can be collected in non-clinical settings and non-clinical staff such as peers
- Suitable for community, outreach and prison settings



Aim: To evaluate HCV prevalence and trends over time among people tested through the New South Wales (NSW) DBS Pilot between 2018 and 2025.

Methods:

The NSW DBS Pilot is an observational study of people testing for HCV RNA from DBS samples collected across participating community and prison sites.

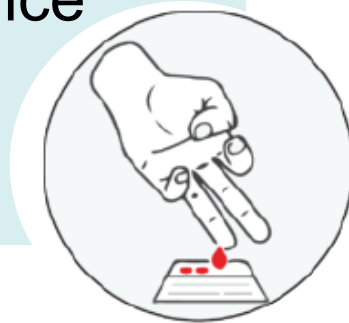
- ≥ 16 years and at risk of HCV

Partnership between St Vincent's Reference Laboratory, Sydney Sexual Health Clinic and NSW Ministry of Health

Samples sent via mail and results delivered to patients by preferred method

Baseline patient demographics were summarised, and HCV RNA prevalence was examined overall, by setting type and over time

- September 2018 – December 2025



Who was tested?

35,110

DBS HCV tests



34%

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
Prison: 43% | Community: 28%

38%

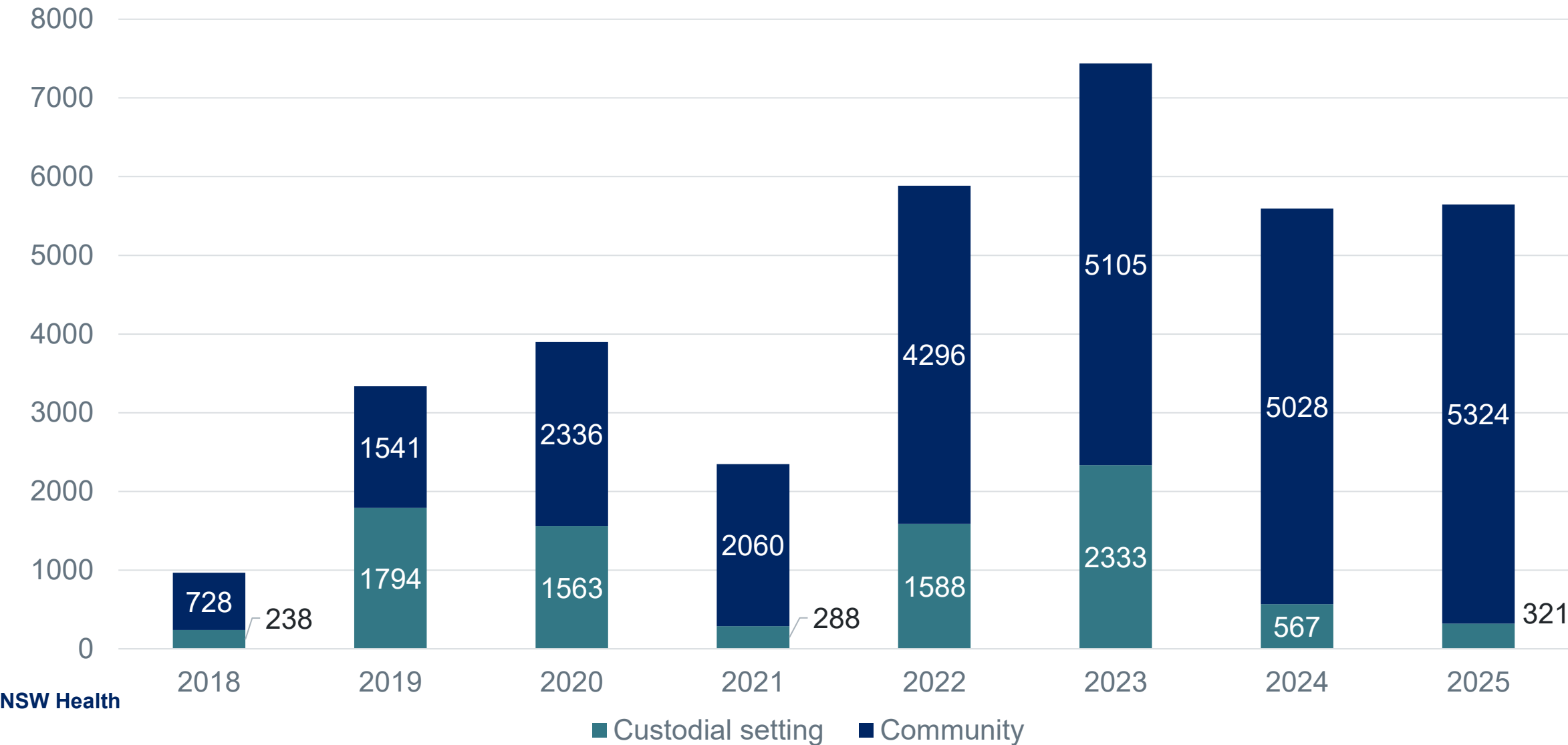
Injected drugs in the last month
Community: 65% | Prison: 48%

The program consistently reached people with characteristics associated with higher HCV risk.

Hepatitis C DBS Testing Over Time



Figure 1: Number of HCV DBS RNA tests completed over time by setting type (2018 – 2025)



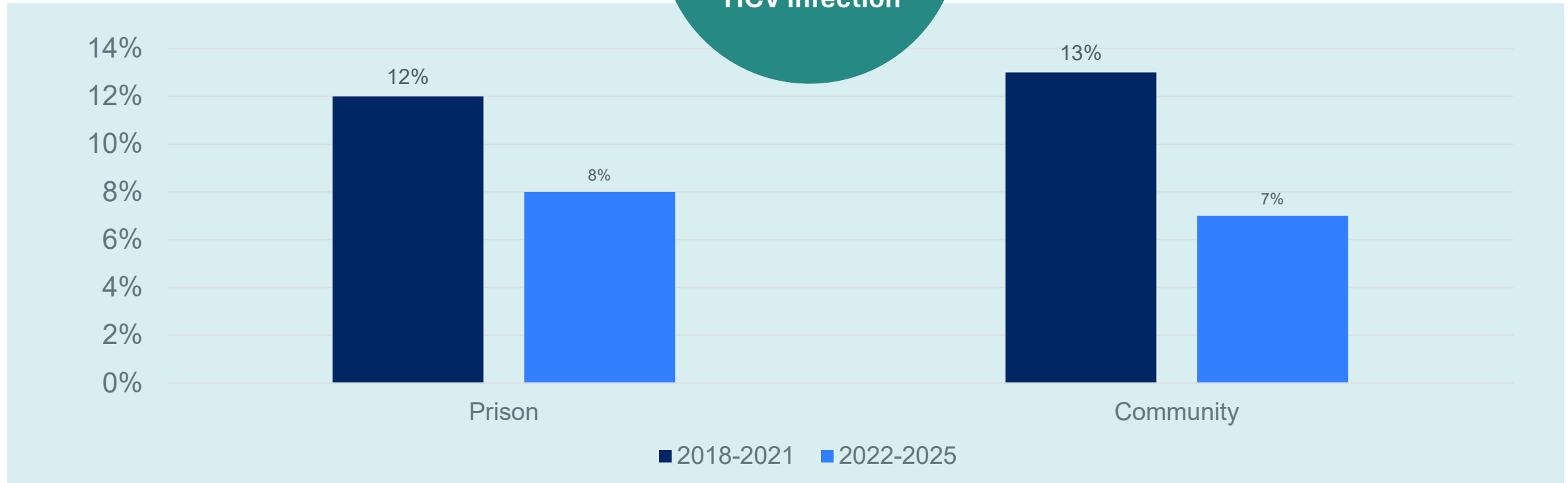
Results – Current HCV Infection (RNA detectable)

8% In custodial
settings

9%

Overall current
HCV infection

7% In community



Conclusion:

1

The NSW DBS Pilot scaled up hepatitis C RNA testing statewide, delivering more than 35,000 tests and consistently reaching populations at highest risk.

2

Prevalence of current hepatitis C infection declined from 13% to 7%, demonstrating significant progress towards hepatitis C elimination.

3

Sustained effort is still required to achieve hepatitis C elimination.

Thank you