

Learning from 20,000 engagements: the evolution of Hepatitis NSW's lived experience peer programs

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Background: Since 2017, Hepatitis NSW peer workers have engaged with 20,000 members of the community about hepatitis C and facilitated access to free, equitable healthcare. Through extensive partnership with local health districts (LHDs) and research and community organisations, Hepatitis NSW has provided expanding and evolving initiatives that support and promote hepatitis C (HCV) testing and treatment. Hepatitis NSW peer programs continue to be shaped by community need and lived experience peer participation in achieving New South Wales HCV elimination targets.

Argument: Collaborating with various stakeholders, Hepatitis NSW's peer programs deliver services and outreach which further NSW HCV elimination targets. The Peer Partnership and EMPOWER sub-study programs promote or implement testing and treatment uptake. Some peers share lived experience of hepatitis and treatment through outreach and community events. Peers within Hepatitis NSW also participate and lead communities of practice, skill-sharing and professional development opportunities. Consultation with peer workers has been adopted by partners to improve and evolve programs to ensure efficacy of models of outreach-based care. Commitment to valuing lived experience has underpinned Hepatitis NSW's accomplishments in engagement and collaborative service delivery.

Outcome: 20,000 face-to-face community engagements since 2017 is a key achievement of Hepatitis NSW's peer-based programs and shows the consistent effectiveness of these programs in reach and engaging communities affected by HCV. Peer workers facilitated 8,279 people to be seen by clinical staff, equating to a 41% uptake of additional healthcare from initial engagement. This resulted in 7,000 people being tested for HCV.

Conclusions: Peer workers provide crucial links and expertise which enhance the effectiveness of program delivery and uptake of services within community and across priority populations. Increased participation of lived experience peer workers will ensure ongoing success towards achievement of HCV elimination targets in NSW through continuous engagement.

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