

# The role of health systems in sustainable hepatitis C point-of-care testing in Australia: a qualitative study with policymakers

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## Disclosures

I am a Co-Investigator of a Gilead Sciences Grant.

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## Background & Aim

- Point-of-care testing: simplifies treatment pathways, delivered in non-medical settings, highly accurate and with clinical utility

Australian regulatory agency approves one Point-of-Care diagnostic for:

- Hepatitis C antibodies (Biolytical INSTI HCV antibody test) and
  - Hepatitis C RNA (Cepheid's Xpert® HCV Viral Load Fingerstick test)
- The GeneXpert machine is used at >500 testing locations

**AIM:** To qualitatively investigate the impact of the health system on the sustainability of HCV point-of-care testing in Australia

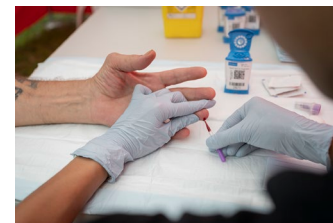


Image by: Conor Ashley

## Methods

Interviews (Sept. 2023 – Jan. 2024) with 29 people involved in HCV policymaking:

- Departments of Health
  - Pathology
  - Community
  - Local Health Districts
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- Data were coded and informed by WHO's Health System Building Blocks Framework
  - Thematic analysis examined how the health system supports and hinders the sustainability of HCV point-of-care testing

## Results

*Community organisations play a role in the implementation plan. We probably would not be able to have a good success story without them... Australia is unique in its sort of community mindset. – P27, DoH*

- **Health Workforce:** Community-led organisations are a key strength in Australia
- **Health Workforce:** Regulatory requirement for training to use GeneXpert was a challenge due to high staff turnover
- **Service Delivery:** Quality assurance training and processes were key for use across settings/staff
- **Leadership and Governance:** State/national 2030 HCV elimination targets keep HCV on the political agenda

## Results

*We have a real problem in this country where any pathology that is done outside the laboratories does not attract a Medicare rebate...Equity of access to testing for people in the community would benefit immensely from having some kind of funding arrangement. — P9, DoH*

- **Health Systems Financing:** Facilitate a Medicare rebate for point-of-care testing
- **Health Information Systems:** Fragmented information systems (e.g., lack of automatic upload of HCV RNA tests from GeneXpert)
- **Medical Products and Technology:** Pathologists more wary about implications of point-of-care testing (e.g., “the patient will still need conventional blood tests”)
- **Medical Products and Technology:** Some modalities not TGA approved

## Conclusion & Key Actions

- Centralised coordination, a skilled and resilient workforce, and engagement with affected populations were all highlighted as key for sustainable testing
- A) Continue to engage and seek feedback from community and peer-workers
- B) Check-in with staff regarding GeneXpert training and what they need
- C) Bring pathologists on board

