

QUIHN TOWNSVILLE TMP: A FLEXIBLE APPROACH TO OFFERING HEPATITIS C TREATMENT

Author:

Markham, JA.

QulHN (Qld Injectors Health Network)

Background/Approach:

In July 2015 QulHN Townsville commenced Harm Reduction Services in Townsville, focusing on the TMP (Treatment Management Program), HCV testing and treatment support program. Townsville is remote, with a population of 190,000 an estimated 7% identifying as ATSI and has a large geographic area (696.2 km²) taking 40 minutes to get North to South. With a large itinerant population, poor public transport, majority of secondary site NSPs, and lack of education and knowledge around BBVs amongst general service providers, developing partnerships has been the key to innovative treatment recruitment.

Partnerships were developed with local Gastroenterologists, The Townsville Hospital liver clinic, General Practitioners, TalHS (Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Health Service), Rehabilitation Centres, correctional centres, youth detention centres, community centres, homeless shelters and local services.

To reach maximum community engagement, outreach services were employed to engage with the community about harm reduction practices, Hepatitis transmission, testing, treatment and recruitment for HCV treatment, and NSP provision.

To further expand engagement, in July 2017 a mobile outreach NSP (Needle Syringe Program) was initiated in a truck at set locations and times, there were barriers with this model including our community fearing being stigmatised or persecuted by police if seen accessing the NSP and timeframes being prohibitive.

In response to these limitations, outreach foot patrols and NSP "home" delivery were implemented in November 2017. The response from clients has been very positive with NSP numbers increasing significantly monthly.

Through these partnerships and outreach models, QulHN TMP have screened 73 clients (24% ATSI), with 79% achieving SVR12, 18% not attending SVR12, and 1 resistant.

We've learnt we need to continue the facilitation of learning with storytelling, discussion, community presentations, community bar-b-ques, offering mini education sessions, and in-service training for other service providers. We will also need to outreach to outlying districts; including Charters Towers and Ingham.

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