

Action towards hepatitis C management in Queensland Prisons

Real insights from the Queensland Prison Forum

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Background

The Queensland Prison Forum, funded by Queensland Health and coordinated by ASHM, has been held annually since 2018. The Prison Forum brings together health professionals working across Queensland correctional centres, as well as those providing in-reach or telehealth services to discuss and develop improvements in hepatitis C (HCV) testing, treatment and the patient experience.

The Prison Forum focuses on identifying effective strategies for delivering high-quality care within the unique challenges of the correctional setting. It supports efforts towards the elimination of HCV while recognising the structural and operational constraints of healthcare delivery in custodial environments

Approach

The full-day, face-to-face program attracts 70 participants, including health professionals working in Queensland correctional centres and those delivering in-reach or telehealth services. Attendees represent a broad cross-section of roles - nursing, leadership, public health, policy, health promotion, and academia; from both government and non-government sectors.

The Prison Forum provides a dedicated space for participants to exchange strategies, identify service-specific challenges, identify service-specific challenges, and collaboratively explore practical, actionable solutions to improve HCV care. The event aims to address both service-level and systemic barriers within correctional settings across the state.

A dynamic steering committee drives the Prison Forum, selecting the theme, shaping the program, and identifying relevant keynote speakers. In 2025, the theme was point-of-care testing (PoCT) and supporting continuity of care during the transition between prison and the community for people undergoing HCV treatment.

Unlike most other Australian jurisdictions, Queensland does not have a centralised prison health service, resulting in significant variability in HCV testing, treatment and models of care. To help address this, a key feature of each Prison Forum is the Health Service updates - concise presentations highlighting the successes and challenges of each HCV program from the past 12 months. At the 2025 Forum, these updates were delivered as 10-minute tabletop presentations, which received very positive feedback.

“The “speed dating” session with talks with each Prison Health Service was incredibly helpful at understanding the different models and different barriers that services are faced with”. QLD Prison Forum participant

A powerful session at the 2025 Prison Forum featured a panel discussion focused on creating culturally safe spaces for HCV testing and treatment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in prisons. Panellists included a person with lived experience of HCV treatment in prison, a Cultural Liaison Officer, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker, and an Aboriginal man delivering education programs within the prisons system.

“The panel discussion hosted by Troy Combo was very insightful. I believe it is so important to accurately represent our First Nations people in all avenues of our work in the hepatitis C space” QLD Prison Forum participant.

Outcomes

The Prison Forum is a highly regarded event, as consistently reflected in annual post-event evaluations. The 2025 Prison Forum again demonstrated near-unanimous agreement among participants on key measures of knowledge gained and overall satisfaction.

- 97% Participants reported improved knowledge and confidence in providing HCV services
- 97% Participants reported improved confidence and anticipated better client outcomes
- 100% Participants reported that this activity was entirely or mostly relevant to their role
- 100% Participants reported that this activity entirely, mostly or partially met their overall learning needs

“The consistency and synergy in the messaging, the quantity and quality of strategic advice, getting to meet contacts from other organisations” QLD Prison Forum participant.

ASHM leads the development of a Summary Report following the Prison Forum, capturing key insights from the event and, importantly, identifying priority areas for action to support advocacy and continued progress toward HCV elimination.

In addition, ASHM, supported by the Prison Forum Steering Committee, is working towards a follow-up event to be held in late 2025. The Interim Queensland Prison Forum will provide a brief overview of key outcomes from the face-to-face Prison Forum and highlight areas for ongoing action. This online event is designed to expand reach and engage a broader audience.

“Health is never one person or one teams job, it does take a whole team of all professionals working from different disciplines and through different perspectives with one goal - better health outcomes” QLD Prison Forum participant.

Conclusions

The Prison Forum serves as a vital platform for knowledge-sharing and strategic planning, addressing systematic challenges in HCV testing, treatment, and continuity of care. Feedback underscores the importance of maintaining focus on these priorities to improve healthcare delivery. Increasing engagement and support from Queensland Corrective Services remains a key objective for future Prison Forums.

The successful Queensland Prison Forum model is now being extended to other jurisdictions, with an inaugural event planned for Victoria in late 2025.