

Expanding Access, Enhancing Equity: POCT for Hepatitis B and C in South-East Queensland's CALD Communities

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Why

In Australia the burden of chronic hepatitis B (CHB) falls disproportionately on communities born overseas in regions where the virus is more prevalent. The 2023 National Viral Hepatitis B Mapping Project report provides the alarming data of the number of people living with hepatitis B either unaware of their status and not engaged in care.

The data available for those living with hepatitis C virus (HCV) whilst robust, does not give insight into the number of people living in Australia from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) populations potentially living with HCV.

We know barriers for our CALD communities accessing testing and care include language differences, cultural beliefs, and simple lack of knowledge, and other factors—such as fear of discrimination, stigma, social isolation, or judgment—drive many to hide their status and avoid medical care entirely.



How

ECCQ's Love Health Program through its extensive work in the CALD community understands these concerns and with the Kirby Institute partnered with the successful National Australian HCV Point-of-Care Testing Program. The Program undertakes screening using the HCV antibody testing (bioLytical Laboratories INSTI® Antibody Test) and the HbsAg (Abbott Alere Determine II HBsAg) tests for **ALL** people tested. With HIV testing if HCV or HBV positive results obtained.

The Bi-lingual Community Health Workers (BCHW) within the Program undertook the required training and translated the survey forms into Chinese, Vietnamese and Korean to assist our community members. A suite of letters was developed for people screened to advise the testing and results undertaken with positive and negative results included.

Where

Whilst the Love Health Program would like to expand its reach, its work in direct client engagement is in South-East Queensland (SEQ) at this time.

The Program undertakes testing in multiple locations including cultural festivals and community events. Specific testing events have been organised and included in community awareness and education workshops undertaken by the BCHWs. Awareness raising of the availability of free testing includes through word-of-mouth, multiple social media platforms (in English and other languages), local ethnic newspapers and information stalls etc.



Results

From the commencement of our collaboration with the National Australian HCV Point-of-Care Testing Program to the 19th June 2025 the Program has tested 431 people (309 females and 122 males). With 431 HCV tests, 429 HBV tests and 10 HIV tests undertaken.

EVERY individual tested received education about HBV and HCV including potential further testing required, vaccination, transmission routes, management and monitoring and availability of treatment if needed.

People were tested from 40 different countries of birth with 27 different languages identified as spoken at home.

All people with a positive result were provided information to take to their GP to undertake confirmatory testing and ongoing engagement in care, and further followed up by the BCHW to provide appropriate support where required.



Where to from here?

The Love Health Program continues to undertake testing and awareness raising within the CALD communities of SEQ. Planning for attendance and undertaking testing at upcoming cultural events and pop-up testing sites. People can register through our QR code for testing at a location convenient for them. The Love Health Program's use of multiple engagement strategies is indicative of the complexities of reaching a broad population group. Every person receives education about HBV and HCV this will not only increase community knowledge but also reduce stigma and discrimination associated with these health conditions.

Funding for this initiative is from our existing Queensland Health funding, therefore, with increased funding we would be able to increase capacity for further outreach into potentially affected communities.



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