

LESSONS FROM THE INSIDE: ENHANCING HEPATITIS B AND C PREVENTION AND TREATMENT IN THE PRISON SECTOR

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Synopsis: Around 80,000 people cycle through Australian prisons annually, with the ex-prisoner population estimated at more than 400,000. In the 2017 National Prisoner Census, Australia's prevalent prisoner population was 41,202, of whom 92% were men, distributed across approximately 100 individual correctional centres. Indigenous Australians made up 27% of the prisoner population, and were 14 times more likely than non-Indigenous to be imprisoned. Almost 50% of Australian prisoners report injecting drug use, and 70% are incarcerated for drug-related crimes. With approximately 50% of all prisoners being non-immune to hepatitis B, and 20-30% being chronically infected with HCV it is clear there is both a large burden of disease and an opportunity for intervention against viral hepatitis. However, delivery of health services in the prison context is challenging, as prisons feature complex bureaucratic structures, overcrowding, frequent movements, high rates of mental illness, and uncontrolled exposure to violence and illicit drugs.

Against this backdrop, this presentation will overview: the prevalence and incidence of hepatitis B and C infections in the prison setting; the uptake and efficacy of hepatitis B immunisation in the NSW prisons; and the development of hepatitis assessment and treatment services in the NSW prisons and nationally.

There is good progress being made in hepatitis B and C prevention and treatment in the prison sector across Australia, but much work remains.