

# A HIDDEN POPULATION: SUPPORTING HEALTHY AGEING FOR PEOPLE WHO INJECT DRUGS

## Authors:

Byrne, J.<sup>1 2</sup>, Walker, M.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Australian Injecting and Illicit Drug Users League (AIVL), Canberra, Australia. <sup>2</sup> International Network on Hepatitis in Substance Users.

**Background/Approach:** Availability of harm reduction and treatment interventions has resulted in people who use/inject drugs living longer and requiring aged care services. Understanding the unpreparedness of the aged care sector to engage with this cohort, AIVL conducted a scoping project to understand what new interventions need to be implemented to respond to emerging needs in differing aged care contexts.

**Analysis/Argument:** A literature review was conducted, demonstrating significant gaps in research and resources. Six national consultations across three sites (two metropolitan, one regional) were undertaken with aged care providers and community members to gauge understanding of issues affecting older people who inject drugs and understand how healthy ageing can be supported amongst this cohort, informing a comprehensive needs analysis report and an online training package.

**Outcomes/Results:** Consultations highlighted a lack of training and low health literacy across the aged care workforce. Drug users had a highly negative view of engaging with these services. Workers had minimal understanding of people who inject/use drugs and their comorbidities including HCV. Moreover, workers indicated they are not equipped to undertake specialised healthcare including provision of HCV prevention and treatment. In addition to publishing a comprehensive needs analysis report on the practitioner and system needs for supporting healthy ageing amongst this cohort, AIVL has subsequently developed an online training package focusing on building capacity within aged care providers to respond to the unique needs of older people who inject drugs, older people on pharmacotherapies and older people living with HCV or HCV-related complications.

**Conclusions/Applications:** AIVL's investigations are a novel exploration of the lack of preparedness of the aged care sector to provide suitable care to people who are living with HCV and/or inject/use drugs. With further research and collaboration, policy and best practice changes to aged care services can be made to improve health outcomes.

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