

## On the way up – making progress towards hepatitis C elimination in NSW

### Authors:

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**Background:** NSW Health has a goal to eliminate hepatitis C (HCV) as a public health concern by 2028. Large increases in HCV treatment initiations in NSW occurred with direct-acting antiviral (DAA) treatment availability from 2016 but have steadily declined since then. To reverse this trend, NSW Health released a comprehensive plan with the NSW HCV Strategy (2022 – 2025).

**Argument:** The Strategy prioritises working closely with key stakeholders to improve access to testing and treatment in key settings; addressing barriers to care including stigma and discrimination; deploying a peer workforce to support access to care; and improving data collection and analysis. In 2022, NSW Health activated 19 POC machines through the National Australian HCV Point-of-Care (POC) Testing Program, scaled up the NSW HIV and HCV Dried Blood Spot testing pilot, updated the NSW Needle and Syringe Program (NSP) Guidelines enhance HCV transmission prevention efforts and conducted incentivised testing and treatment blitzes in NSPs through Project SONIC.

**Results:** Between July and September 2022, the number of HCV treatment initiations increased by 42% compared to the previous quarter and the largest quarterly increase seen in NSW since curative treatments were first introduced (*Figure 1*). Almost all Local Health Districts (LHD) increased activity with the highest increase seen in Mid North Coast LHD (110% increase compared to the quarterly average). NSW has treated 54% of people (34,057) estimated to be living with HCV, saving an estimated \$99,785,905 in avoidable care costs.

**Conclusions:** Since the release of the NSW HCV Strategy, the number of people accessing HCV treatment in NSW has increased reversing a previous downtrend. Sustained efforts in key settings will be required to achieve WHO elimination goals in NSW.

**Disclosure of Interest Statement:** NSW Health funds the Kirby Institute, UNSW to produce HCV prevalence estimates to include in our analyses. NSW Health does not receive funding from pharmaceutical companies for HCV therapies.

**Figure 1: Number of HCV DAA treatment initiations in NSW between July 2019 September 2022**

