

PEER INSIGHTS: UNDERSTANDING MOTIVATORS AND BARRIERS TO THE UPTAKE OF HEPATITIS C TREATMENTS AMONG PEOPLE WHO INJECT DRUGS

Authors: [Chong S](#)¹, Brown G¹

¹ Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, School of Psychology and Public Health, La Trobe University

Background:

The breakthrough in Hepatitis C treatment with direct-acting antiviral (DAA) medicines and their listing on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme sets the trajectory to achieve national prevalence and transmission targets. The uptake of treatment among people who inject drugs (PWID) was promising at the onset but evidence is emerging that uptake is slowing. Different strategies may be required to engage PWID who are reluctant or sceptical about the new DAA treatments or may experience barriers to accessing treatment.

Argument:

Peer-led organisations working with PWID communities have on-the-ground insights about the perceptions and attitudes of PWID towards the DAA treatments.

An innovative 18 month peer-based project was developed in collaboration with three peer-led organisations - Harm Reduction Victoria, NSW Users and AIDS Association, Peer Based Harm Reduction, WA. Peer insights are being collected at regular intervals through focus groups with staff and trained peer volunteers from the three collaborative organisations to identify the evolving barriers, enablers and triggers that influence capacity and willingness (or disinterest) of PWID to take up DAA treatments. To complement the focus groups, semi-structured interviews covering similar themes are being conducted with PWID.

Outcomes:

The DAA treatment environment is evolving and rapid turnaround of interim findings to the peer-led organisations, community, clinical, and policy sectors is essential. Short broadsheet reports describing the evolving experiences of PWID, and the implications for refinement or reorientation of strategies to scale-up treatment access will be developed throughout the study.

Applications:

The knowledge and experience within peer programs is a vital asset to strategies to scale up of DAA treatment among PWID. The study is focused on translating these “real time” peers insights into resources to support policy and programs to tailor to the needs of the PWID community – this tailoring is critical to achieving the goal of eliminating hepatitis C.