

Using social media to raise awareness of viral hepatitis during a pandemic

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Background: Despite the months long state-wide 2021 COVID lockdown, Hepatitis NSW aimed to raise the awareness of hepatitis B and hepatitis C through social media platforms during NSW Hepatitis Awareness Week (26 July-30 July). A grant from NSW Communities and Justice through their Social Sector Transformation Fund provided the opportunity.

Argument: With the lockdown significantly limiting and hampering opportunities for face-to-face and public interactions, usage of social media was one of the principle means for people to exchange information. However, for the same reasons, public health discourse on social media was largely around COVID, the delta variant, vaccines, and associated mandates – often to a vitriolic level. Yet, despite COVID, hepatitis B and hepatitis C were still important issues that needed to remain in public awareness.

Outcome: The weekend before World Hepatitis Day, Hepatitis NSW launched the initiative to increase awareness of testing, management, and treatment/cure of hepatitis B and hepatitis C. Using ten different adverts – video and display – across Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Google Ads, the adverts ran for a ten-day period. Targeted to people living in NSW, they were seen, in total, over 5.4 million times, with over half a million interactions. The ads directed people to pages on the hep.org.au website – resulting a quadrupling in web traffic and doubling of engagements with our Hepatitis Infoline and/or webchat.

Conclusions: Response to the advertisements was largely positive, and raised awareness, discussion, and engagement around hepatitis B and hepatitis C health care. Despite a small cohort of individuals who used the adverts as an opportunity to push back on COVID related issues, the adverts were resoundingly successful. The size and reach of the initiative demonstrated that, with the right focus and messaging, it was possible to cut through the noise of other public health issues. Please note, a short section of video can be played at this presentation.

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