

Project SONIC - Service Optimisation in Needle and Syringe Programs with Incentives and Clinical Pathways

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Background: NSW has a goal to eliminate HCV as a public health concern by 2028 and recent research has indicated that HCV identification and diagnosis must be increased by 50% in order to achieve elimination. In 2022, NSW Health released the NSW HCV Strategy 2022-2025 and identified people who inject drugs as a priority population and Needle and Syringe Programs (NSPs) as a key setting for action. While many NSPs provide on-site HCV testing for people who inject drugs, improved pathways to care are required to improve testing and treatment uptake.

Analysis: In 2021 and 2022, NSW Health delivered '*Project Service Optimisation in Needle and Syringe Programs (NSP) with Incentives and Clinical Pathways*' (SONIC). Project SONIC aimed to increase HCV testing and treatment among people who inject drugs through incentives, and flexible NSP models of care including dried blood spot testing and traditional venepuncture. The project also deployed an extensive network of peer workers from Hepatitis NSW and the NUAA to promote service user engagement and support.

Results: Project SONIC was delivered in 22 NSPs across 11 Local Health Districts. 1,033 people were provided education and tested for HCV; 113 (11%) RNA positive results were detected; and 30 (27%) people commenced treatment.

Conclusions: Incentivised testing and treatment blitzes along with peer partnerships and support are effective in increasing testing among people who inject drugs within NSPs. However, additional efforts are required to increase linkage to treatment and care following positive results. The learnings from this project will be applied to investigate alternative models of care to improve treatment uptake among people accessing NSPs.

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