

## **Peer specialists working in partnership with clinical staff to enhance hepatitis C testing and treatment among people who inject drugs: Peer experiences from the PATH-EXpanded model**

**Authors:** [Dicka J](#)<sup>1</sup>, Crawford S<sup>1</sup>, Armstrong S<sup>1</sup>, Bamford S<sup>1</sup>, Weidner C<sup>1</sup>, Watkinson S<sup>2,3</sup>, Scott A<sup>4</sup>, Elsum I<sup>5</sup>, O'Keefe D<sup>5,6</sup>, Doyle J<sup>5,6</sup>, Stoove M<sup>5,6</sup>, Hellard M<sup>3,4,5,6,7</sup>, Pedrana A<sup>5,6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Harm Reduction Victoria, <sup>2</sup> Victorian Infectious Disease Service, Royal Melbourne Hospital, <sup>3</sup> The Peter Doherty Institute for Infection and Immunity, <sup>4</sup> Department of Infectious Diseases, The Alfred and Monash University, <sup>5</sup> Disease Elimination Program, Burnet Institute, <sup>6</sup> School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine, Monash University, <sup>7</sup> School of Population and Global Health, The University of Melbourne

**Presenter's email:** [jdicka@hrvic.org.au](mailto:jdicka@hrvic.org.au)

**Background:** People who inject drugs (PWID) are a priority population for Australia's hepatitis C virus (HCV) elimination efforts and initiatives are needed to actively engage this population in HCV testing and treatment. The integration of peer specialists to engage with clients and provide HCV care education are commonplace both in Australia and internationally.

Recently, innovative models that partner peer specialists with healthcare professionals providing HCV care have been implemented.

**Description of Model of Care/Intervention:** Harm Reduction Victoria (HRV) is a key partner on the PATH-EXpanded project in Melbourne, Victoria that will evaluate partnering peer specialists with integrated HCV nurses within community health services targeting PWID. HRV provides and supports peer specialist staff for the project. This presentation will discuss peer experiences working within the PATH-EXpanded model as example to other similar models.

**Effectiveness:** Initial learnings from PATH-Expanded peers suggest the importance of peer-specialist support to clinical activities, whereby health messaging may have greater credibility when coming from peers, and the ability to mutually divulge sensitive information may help elicit more honest responses to risk information (such as receptive needle sharing). Further, healthcare professionals may draw on peer specialists to support phlebotomy or other barriers to care requiring the expert input of the peer specialist.

**Conclusion and Next Steps:** In order to reach, diagnose and treat all those in Australia living with HCV, tailored and innovative interventions need to be developed. Understanding the experiences and learnings from peer specialists – partnered with healthcare professionals – is crucial evidence in the determining the effectiveness of similar models.

### **Disclosure of Interest Statement:**

The Eliminate Hepatitis C Victoria Partnership is funded through an NHMRC partnership grant, with additional funding provided by Gilead Sciences. JD, MH, MS and AP receive investigator-initiated research funding support from Gilead Sciences, Abbvie and Bristol-Myers Squibb and Merck. JD, and their institution have received consultancies from Gilead, AbbVie and Merck. AP and their institution have received consultancies from Gilead.