HEPNS: CURBING HEPATITIS C TRANSMISSION THROUGH EFFECTIVE LINKAGE OF PEOPLE WHO INJECT SUBSTANCES TO TREATMENT IN NOVA SCOTIA, CANADA

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Background: Every year Nova Scotia has approximately 300 new diagnoses of HCV. People who inject substances (PWIS) are at the highest risk of contracting hepatitis C (HCV). The mission of HepNS is to reduce the stigma surrounding HCV, educate PWIS on preventive measures and link people who have HCV to care.

description of model: Through a PHAC grant, model implementation began in April 2018 to provide education, peer support & practical assistance to PWIS seeking care for HCV. In a region where transportation is often a barrier to HCV testing and care which is sensitive to PWIS past experiences, this HepNS program removes that barrier. By accompanying the person every step of the way there is a higher chance of them following through with the suggested treatment plan.

Effectiveness: To date, this program has worked with 4 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who serve PWIS. A total of 21 educational workshops & 4 events have been already occurred this year in 4 regions of the province. At present, data is not available, but the program seeks to achieve 20% of PWIS accessing the program to remain engaged in care over the next 6 months. This will be done through transportation assistance, connection to HCV specialists for treatment, appointment reminders and any other support the client identifies would help them remain engaged and complete treatment.

next steps/conclusion: Ongoing educational sessions and events will continue to engage PWIS. The number of persons engaged, the type of supports felt needed by the client and the achievement of goals along the HCV cascade of care will be tracked. HepNS will continue to connect with other NGO's to connect with PWIS that want treatment but need support every step of the way. It is hoped this program will increase the number of PWIS cured of HCV.