

## **DRIED BLOOD SPOT FOR HIV AND HCV – TESTING PRIORITY POPULATION GROUPS IN THE NSW CUSTODIAL SETTING**

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**Introduction:** The prevalence of Hepatitis C (HCV) within NSW Correctional settings is much higher than in the broader community. Access to HCV testing in the custodial setting presents varied challenges restricting HCV treatment initiation for patients. In August 2018, the Dried Blood Spot (DBS) Research Project was commenced in NSW Correctional Centres. DBS testing has allowed many of these challenges to be met and overcome by providing a different model of testing: The DBS In-Reach Model.

The aim of the Dried Blood Spot (DBS) Research project is to improve access to HIV and HCV testing and treatment in NSW Prisons.

**Methods:** The project has been rolled out across a variety of custodial settings including reception areas, general prison areas, prison mental health units, and accommodation areas. This means bringing the test to the patient - not the patient to the test. This provides greater reach for testing as conventional blood testing is only allowed within prison clinics. The DBS testing In-Reach Model has overcome many of the custodial setting challenges faced by both patients and clinicians relating to HIV and HCV testing and treatment.

**Results:** To date the project has tested 299 patients of whom 55 (18.4%) were HCV RNA positive and were referred for treatment. Of the patients who tested HCV positive 49% identified as Aboriginal.

**Conclusion:** The project has improved HCV testing equity as it is targeted to patients that historically may not have engaged with traditional health services both within and outside of the custodial setting. The In-Reach Model has enhanced health care access to people who suffer from mental health issues and has also provided greater access to the incarcerated Indigenous population within NSW. This model has also served as a harm reduction and health education tool for patients, health staff and correctional officers, and has been met with great enthusiasm.

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