

## HEPATITIS C IN PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS: TIMELINE FROM SCREENING TO CURE

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### **Background:**

Portugal is committed to the goals defined by the WHO in 2016, with a view to eliminating hepatitis C by 2030. Despite the high efficacy of new direct-acting antiviral drugs (DAA) in eliminating the infection, the low rate of diagnosis and treatment in people who inject drugs (PWID) compromises their healing potential.

### **Methods:**

The results were collected from 264 HCV screening sessions for PWID in Cascais and Oeiras between 11/01/2020 – 12/31/2021 at SER+, in a Mobile Unit and in ETET (Specialized Technical Treatment Team) Oeiras/Cascais.

Screening sessions and clinical monitoring were carried out by 2 specialized technicians, and linkage and follow-up to health care provided by a peer.

### **Results:**

148/264 were tested for HCV; 134/148 not reactive; 18/148 reactive; 2/18 did not accept to be referenced; 10/18 dropped out; 6/18 were followed up. 2/6 are cured now.

74/116 did not perform the test, because they were cured; 9/116 not tested, (reactive for HCV, in treatment); 33/116 not tested, (reactive for HCV, but not linked to care); 32/33 were reconnected to care; 15/32 dropped out; 17/32 were followed up, two are cured now; 15/17 of those who remain in follow-up, four started therapy.

55% of those who dropped out, refused peer mediation; 95% of those who followed up, accepted peer mediation.

### **Conclusion:**

There is a low rate of diagnosis and treatment in this population, compromising their healing potential, despite a significant higher adherence in cases that accepted peer mediation. In recent years, different models of treatment for hepatitis C outside the hospital environment have been studied, seeking to increase its accessibility. It was found that it is possible to obtain high rates of adherence and response to therapy (above 90%) with weekly/biweekly drug dispensing schedules, in places such as community centers attended by patients undergoing addiction treatment.

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