

Coordinated Hepatitis responses to Enhance the Cascade of Care by optimising Existing Surveillance Systems (CHECCS) in Victoria

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Background: Identifying patients with hepatitis C infection and promoting linkage to care and treatment is essential for eliminating hepatitis C in Victoria. However, 45% of people living with hepatitis C in Victoria in 2016 remain untreated. A new approach to support health care providers to engage individuals in follow-up testing and treatment using the existing notifiable diseases surveillance system is being piloted. This pilot project aims to assess barriers to care and to support uptake of treatment.

Methods: From 1st September 2021, we implemented follow-up of newly notified cases of unspecified hepatitis C (antibody positive) with diagnosing doctors to gather enhanced surveillance data on demographics, risk factors, testing, treatment and where appropriate provide advice on clinical resources, referral pathways and education opportunities.

Results: Preliminary data from the first month of follow-up were analysed. Of 76 cases notified, 68 were eligible for contact. The majority (93%) of diagnosing doctors were contacted but one-third required a call back to gather complete data. Cases were mostly diagnosed in primary care (81%). Of those contacted, 54% had already ordered a nucleic acid (RNA) test to assess status of infection, 10% were planning to order the test at the next visit, and 8% had already referred the individual for management elsewhere. Of those with RNA test results (n=25), 11 (40%) were positive, 5 had been referred and 4 were planning to prescribe.

Conclusion: This early assessment indicates that enhanced follow-up is feasible and acceptable to diagnosing doctors. The proportion of cases with a positive nucleic acid test result was consistent with population treatment uptake estimates. Initial findings suggest the majority of newly diagnosed hepatitis C cases during the period assessed were already engaged in follow-up care and/or provided referral by their diagnosing doctor.

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