

PEER HARM REDUCTION IN THE YARD (PHRY) – A PILOT PEER EDUCATION PROGRAM IN NSW PRISONS

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Background:

Despite high levels of Direct Acting Antiviral (DAA) treatment for Hepatitis C in NSW prisons, ongoing virus transmission and engagement in testing and treatment remain a challenge.

Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network (the Network) and NUAA identified that a peer program in which people receive education and support from an individual with lived experience of injecting drug use may increase engagement and the impact of messages related to hepatitis C and Harm Reduction.

Description of model of care/intervention:

Education sessions covering different core topics designed for the custodial space aimed to support participants to employ best practice prevention strategies, engage in testing and treatment and encourage others at the centre to do the same.

Group participants also worked with NUAA and the Network to plan a Hepatitis C testing and overdose education event for the broader population at the centre.

Effectiveness:

Pilot groups demonstrate good retention and positive feedback. Participants reported discussing education with the wider custodial population and also referred other individuals into the program. (More evaluation data will be available over the coming months).

At the co-designed education event promoted by program participant's other people at the centre received testing and education after it was promoted by participants

Participant feedback - "I have spoken with people I have used with about safer ways to use" and "A key take away message is not to judge myself by other people's stigma"

Conclusion and next steps:

This pilot demonstrated that a peer approach -

- Can deliver engaging, targeted and in-depth health education not otherwise available in the NSW custodial system
- Offers unique insight into the challenges individuals face navigating Hepatitis C risks and drug use in prisons
- Can successfully contribute to the design and delivery of clinical and education interventions in prisons.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

NIL