

IN-PERSON INTERACTIONS IMPACT ON HCV, HIV AND SYPHILIS RATES IN AT RISK POPULATIONS

Authors:

Ford P¹, Heather House²

¹Omega Specialty Nurses (OSN)/SRx Health Solutions (SRx)²

Background:

During Covid-19 restrictions, OSN/SRx worked with two community partners to address Saskatchewan's at-risk population's growing HCV, HIV, and Syphilis rates. This was displayed as a poster at INSHU 2022. Since June 2022, we've partnered with six more community groups. Public Health did not resume STBBI testing and community support when restrictions were eased. Our teams closed this screening gap.

Description of the model of care/intervention:

A nurse, two phlebotomists, a peer support worker, and a community outreach worker make up the OSN/SRx teams. Our teams visit our community partners weekly to test for HCV, HIV, and syphilis and connect clients to additional care, treatment, and support. Needle exchange clinics, drop-in centers, and safe injection sites are included. Addictions and harm-reduction education are also available.

Effectiveness:

200 HCV, 44 HIV, and 13 syphilis positives were found in 368 OSN/SRx tests in 2021. 28 of 80 HCV-positive patients underwent therapy. In 2022, we tested 686 people, the majority were tested between June and December. 274 were HCV positive, 51 were HIV positive, 8 were newly diagnosed with HIV, and 36 were newly diagnosed with syphilis. 44 of 97 HCV-positive individuals underwent therapy.

Conclusion and next steps:

Due to government restrictions on venue capacity during the COVID-19 pandemic, many at-risk communities were unable to access services. HCV, HIV, and Syphilis infections increased in 2022. Anecdotally, the pandemic, lack of services, scarcity of clean needles, and increased isolation that fostered drug use contributed. We can now offer in-person testing and meet clients where they are without restrictions. By adding testing sites, we've tested more people. We expect this knowledge to help conference attendees tackle rising HCV infection rates.