

# REMOVING BARRIERS TO TESTING FOR PEOPLE: FREE, PRIVATE AND FLEXIBLE

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## Background

Dried Blood Spot (DBS) is an innovative finger stick test for HIV and hepatitis C that is accessed by eligible people online or via an approved site. The NSW DBS Self-Sampling Testing Pilot commenced in 2016 to increase HIV testing among men who have sex with men and people from African and Asian countries.

In September 2017, the Pilot expanded to also include HCV RNA among Aboriginal people and people who have ever injected drugs and a settings-based approach that targeted services accessed by at-risk populations.

The pilot will run until December 2020.

## Description

DBS testing was added to the mix of options in NSW to enable earlier diagnosis and linkage to treatment for people who experience barriers to accessing conventional testing services. The finger stick test is free, easy and confidential.

The DBS pilot increases access for at-risk populations by participating sites offering the test in settings where conventional blood testing is difficult due to poor venous access or not possible, such as drug and alcohol services; needle and syringe programs; outreach and community health services.

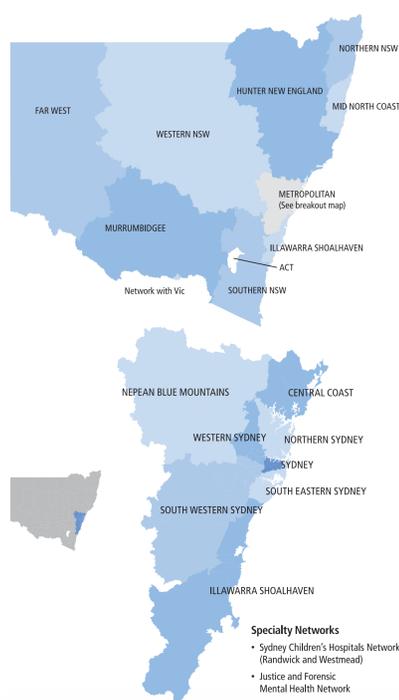
Sites can participate in three ways:

- assist with testing and delivery of results
- assist with testing and SHIL will deliver results
- distribute test kits for people to take away with them

This flexibility supports equitable access and a culturally appropriate service.

Eligible populations include Aboriginal people; people and their sexual partners from Africa or Asia; men who have sex with men; and people who have ever injected drugs.

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## Results

From September 2017 to June 2018, 80 hepatitis C DBS tests were done, with 12 people tested positive and linked into care.

From November 2016 to June 2018, 41% (439) of people who ordered a DBS test (1082) have never been tested for HIV before or have not tested in the previous two years. Of 672 HIV DBS tests done, 5 people tested positive and are linked into care.

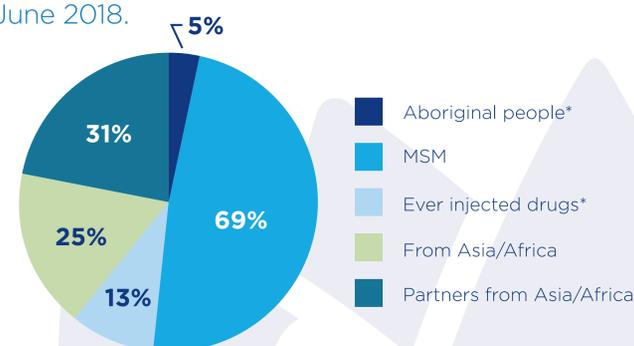
**Table 1: Recruitment data for the NSW Dried Blood Spot (DBS) Self-Sampling HIV and Hepatitis C Testing Pilot, from November 2016 to June 2018**

Total Recruitment Data	Number (%)
Number of registrations for HIV DBS test	1082
Number of registrations for hepatitis C DBS test*	131
Number of HIV tests done	672
Number of hepatitis C tests done*	80
DBS return rate for HIV tests	672 (62%)
DBS return rate for hepatitis C tests*	80 (61%)
Proportion of people registering who have never tested before or had tested over 2 years ago	439 (41%)
Number of reactive HIV results	5
Number of reactive hepatitis C results*	12

Data Sources: NSW DBS Research Database; NSW State Reference Laboratory for HIV, St Vincent's Hospital  
\*Hepatitis C RNA testing included from September 2017.

### Priority populations

Proportion of tests done by priority population for the NSW DBS Self-Sampling HIV and Hepatitis C Testing Pilot, from November 2016 to June 2018.



Data Source: NSW DBS Research Database  
\*Aboriginal people and people who have ever injected drugs included from September 2017.

## Next Steps/Conclusion

DBS has provided an innovative testing model which provides flexibility to support equitable access for priority populations who may have experienced barriers to conventional health services. DBS has contributed to increased testing and access to hepatitis C and HIV treatment for people who have never previously tested or tested infrequently.

<sup>1</sup>Disclosure of Interest Statement

NSW Health funds the Kirby Institute to produce hepatitis C prevalence estimates to include in our analyses. NSW Health does not receive funding from pharmaceutical companies for hepatitis C therapies.