

THE NATIONAL PRISONS HEPATITIS EDUCATION PROGRAM (HepPEd PROGRAM): AN EVIDENCE-BASED HEPATITIS C EDUCATION PROGRAM TO ENHANCE PUBLIC HEALTH LITERACY IN THE AUSTRALIAN PRISON SECTOR

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Background: Prisons are key to Australia's hepatitis C (HCV) elimination efforts. Despite considerable scale-up efforts, testing and treatment uptake amongst people in prison remains sub-optimal. Gaps in HCV health literacy (knowledge; attitudes; competencies) amongst all key populations in the sector (healthcare providers; correctional officers; people in prison) have been identified as major barriers to enhanced uptake, notably: lack of awareness of the simple, curative treatment; stigma; and competing service priorities. Comprehensive HCV education programs tailored to key populations in the sector are likely to overcome these barriers.. The National Prisons Hepatitis Education Program (HepPEd Program) was developed to provide prison-focused sector-wide education to enhance HCV *public health literacy*, and thereby increase testing and treatment uptake in Australian prisons.

Description: Co-developed with National Steering Committees, the HepPEd Program for healthcare providers, correctional officers, and people in prison includes a suite of innovative and multi-modal educational resources targeting HCV health literacy aspects and addressing key barriers. The Program will be delivered opportunistically, such as in informal discussion sessions in tea rooms for staff led by nurse-educators, or wings/yards led by peer educators.. With an overarching by-line of: 'Let's talk about hep C', key messages for each target audience group have been developed: 'Prevent, participate - eliminate (PPE)' (healthcare providers); 'Stop the spread - reduce the risk' (correctional officers); 'Test, treat, cure, prevent – it's simple' (people in prisoner).

Effectiveness: The HepPEd Program will be initially implemented within a stepped wedge randomised controlled trial evaluating the impact on HCV testing and treatment uptake, as well as HCV knowledge, attitudes, and competencies.

Conclusions: The HepPEd Program will likely enhance HCV public health literacy and thereby increase testing and treatment uptake in the prisons. Following evaluation, the Program will be made available nationally, and adapted for international use.

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