

## **CUSTODIAL SETTINGS: THE MISSING LINK TO HEPATITIS C ELIMINATION**

Bradley, L.

*Australian Injecting and Illicit Drug Users League (AIVL)*

**Background:** Findings from a new report by AIVL discusses the policies and procedures that impede Australia's ability to achieve the goal of HCV elimination by 2030. Evidence supports the need for a strengthened focus on priority populations and settings, which includes custodial settings. It is known that custodial settings act as an incubator for HCV transmission. Key issues relating to this are:

- The absence of prison needle and syringe programs is contributing to the ongoing transmission of HCV.
- The discrepancies between jurisdictional policies and processes regarding continuity of care for people exiting custodial settings on DAAs, contrasted with the realities of people's experience as they re-enter community.

**Analysis:** AIVL's consultations with drug user peer-led organisations illustrates the need for consistent harm reduction measures within custodial settings and continuity of care post-release. The effectiveness of the investment made in DAA treatment for incarcerated people is jeopardised if appropriate post-release support is not received. Peer-based programs are known to be an effective means of support and need to be enhanced across all jurisdictions.

**Outcomes:** Despite significant improvements in equivalency of care within custodial settings, ongoing issues include:

1. The lack of prison needle and syringe programs undermines the substantial investment in DAAs.
2. People exiting custodial settings on DAA treatment are not being provided with the support required to ensure successful continuity of treatment. Varying policies, processes and procedures across jurisdictions results in inconsistencies in care, with the consequence being interrupted and/or disconnected treatment.

**Conclusion:** Harm reduction and continuity of treatment are needed for custodial settings to ensure HCV is not transmitted and uninterrupted DAA treatment is administered. Jurisdictional policies and processes need to consistently translate to practice. To achieve elimination in Australia connections between correctional services, health providers and people living with HCV need to be strengthened across all jurisdictions.

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