

BENEFITS OF WORKING WITH A COLLECTIVE IMPACT INITIATIVE TO INFORM RESEARCH: DEVELOPING PATHS TO HEPATITIS C ELIMINATION FOR YOUNG ADULTS WHO INJECT DRUGS

Facente SN^{1,2}, Burk K³, Fraser H⁴, Patel S⁵, Artenie A⁴, Vickerman P⁴, Morris MD⁵

¹ *Division of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, University of California Berkeley, Berkeley, CA*

² *Facente Consulting, Richmond, CA*

³ *San Francisco Department of Public Health, San Francisco, CA*

⁴ *Population Health Sciences, Bristol Medical School, University of Bristol, Bristol, UK*

⁵ *Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, University of California San Francisco, San Francisco, CA*

Background: Nested within End Hep C SF, a collective impact hepatitis C elimination initiative in San Francisco, our research group embarked on a two-year NIH-funded research project on evidence-based elimination approaches for young adult (≤ 30 years of age) people who inject drugs (PWID). Collaborative data-sharing informed new care cascade estimates for this subgroup, and projection models assessed progress toward elimination targets.

Description of model of care: We aimed to disseminate preliminary results and learn how they relate to on-the-ground experiences, to inform subsequent model projections and ensure future interventions capture the needs of young adult PWID. The COVID-19 pandemic forced us to transition planned in-person activities (in-depth interviews and community forums) to a 90-minute virtual group consensus meeting. We advertised the event via End Hep C SF, the University of California San Francisco, and service-providing organizations.

Effectiveness: Thirty-seven people (13 researchers, 19 service providers, 5 health department staff) attended and offered information valuable for subsequent research aims. There was consensus on the importance of focusing on young adult PWID, as many attendees noted that testing and treatment patterns change as PWID age and failing to disaggregate research findings by age may lead to gaps in service provision for younger PWID. Participants also noted that the lack of a point-of-care RNA test in the US makes it nearly impossible to streamline diagnosis of active infection, inhibiting linkage to care and hampering hepatitis C elimination efforts. Despite multiple recruitment efforts, including an incentive for time and expertise, no young adult PWID attended the meeting.

Conclusion and next steps: As COVID-19 vaccination coverage increases, we will hold future in-person activities with young adult PWID. Real-world perspectives of participants in a collective impact initiative can directly inform transmission model parameters and other epidemiological research, thus improving accuracy, relevance, and reach of academic research findings.

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