

## **BELFAST INCLUSION HEALTH SERVICE - ENHANCING HEALTH AND HEPATITIS CARE FOR PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS**

**Authors:** McBrien B<sup>1</sup>, Semple S<sup>2</sup>, O'Donovan D<sup>1,3</sup>, Arnold S<sup>1</sup>, Nugent C<sup>1</sup>, Webb D<sup>1</sup> McDougall N<sup>2</sup> McCormick O<sup>2</sup> McCormick H<sup>2</sup>, Armstrong G<sup>1</sup>

**Affiliations:** <sup>1</sup>Health Protection Directorate, Public Health Agency, Northern Ireland; <sup>2</sup>Belfast Health and Social Care Trust; <sup>3</sup>Queen's University Belfast

### **Disclosure of Interest Statement:**

No conflicts of interest.

### **Background:**

The Belfast Inclusion Health Service (BIHS) supports the health and social care needs of people experiencing homelessness. The service is hosted in a centralised hub and brings services out of the clinic setting, onto the streets, to wrap care around people who need it most, where they need it.

### **Description of service**

BIHS was developed following an outbreak of Hepatitis C (HCV) in people experiencing homelessness in 2016. This flagship 'transformation project', was designed to build a multi-disciplinary team delivering outreach care to people on the streets, in hostels, day centres or crash facilities. The service looks after an increasing number of people with HCV and HIV. Service users are regularly offered screening for blood borne viruses (BBV), with the team providing contact tracing and targeted testing. In addition BIHS administers local and national behavioural risk questionnaires. Specialty hepatology staff offer a monthly outreach HCV clinic and BIHS staff support HCV treatment including daily supervision if required. Local engagement with the team is a result of the huge efforts invested in building strong trusting relationships with this vulnerable community.

### **Effectiveness**

Extensive BBV testing implemented by the hub detected a further outbreak of HCV and HIV in 2020. Between July 2021 to March 2022 139 individuals were screened for BBV and diagnosed 50 HCV infections and 4 HIV infections. BIHS have supported 19 individuals through HCV treatment. In 2021 BIHS carried out 3,083 healthcare consultations supporting the general health and wellbeing of this population.

### **Conclusion and next steps**

The BIHS has been instrumental in delivery of Hepatitis C treatment to people experiencing homelessness, and in detecting the more recent outbreak of Hep C and HIV. This model is being initiated in health and social care trusts across the region, with the aim of creating a Northern Ireland Inclusion Health Network.