

ADDRESSING HCV, HIV AND SYPHILIS RATES AMONG INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS DURING COVID-19 THROUGH COMMUNITY PARTERSHIPS

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Background:

All Nations Hope Network (ANHN) is an organization that provides support and services to First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities who are experiencing HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C.

Since September 2020, Omega Specialty Nurses (OSN) has partnered with ANHN in Regina to provide support to address the growing numbers of HCV, HIV and syphilis among Indigenous peoples in Saskatchewan.

Methods:

The team from OSN; Registered Psychiatric Nurse, and phlebotomist provided weekly visits to ANHN for Point of Care testing for HCV, HIV and syphilis as well as linking clients to additional care, treatment and support, such as access to information on addictions and harm reduction approaches. Offering enhanced supports, is “bringing the care where the individuals are at”.

Results:

In 2021, ANHN’s program with OSN was able to test 471 individuals; 261 were HCV antibody positive, 44 were HIV positive (12 of these were newly found HIV) as well the program was able to identify 13 new cases of syphilis. 80 of these individuals were treatment eligible and 28 of them received treatment.

Conclusion:

Access to proper care and support has been difficult for many Indigenous communities during the Covid-19 pandemic. Testing was not being done by public health. It has been noted that there has been an increase of new infections and re-infections of HCV. We suspect this is related to the pandemic and lack of services being offered, access to clean needles, and an increase in isolation leading to higher drug use. The weekly visits enhanced relationship building and trust that allowed testing and linkage to care.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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