

## **SUSTAINING THE ELIMINATION OF HEPATITS C AMONG PEOPLE WHO CONTINUE TO INJECT DRUGS (PWID)**

Drug treatment providers have put much emphasis and attention on increased testing for blood borne viruses (BBV) and referral to treatment for hepatitis C since the launch of the global elimination of Hep C strategy in 2016 yet the virus continues to be the most common BBV among PWID in the UK and an ongoing rate of new infections. After over a decade of UK policy that focused on recovery/abstinence outcomes rather than harm reduction the recommendations from the Dame Carol Black review in 2021 and the subsequent new drugs strategy now aims to refocuses on prevention and harm reduction. With an end date to the elimination strategy in sight, a third of PWID in 2020 reported inadequate provision of needle & syringe programs (NSP) and 24% reporting the direct sharing of injecting equipment along with 43% reporting both direct and indirect sharing, typically paraphernalia such as water/spoons/filters.

A range of interventions have been redeployed again across CGL and other providers such as lead roles, assertive outreach and increased promotion of NSP interventions along with innovations such as Peer led BBV testing, postal NSP and Hep C treatment provided in community/provider settings however a high awareness remains that the current distribution of new injecting equipment continues to be below 70% of the estimated need of providing a new needle for every injection. We also recognise and identify the need for more intervention and education of PWID around risk behaviour change to reduce the rates of new infections or moreover re-infections.

In this workshop we explore collective action in treatment services and other stakeholders to engage with PWID to both ensure improved full and adequate access to new injecting equipment and also to work on core behaviour change interventions to reduce risk behaviours that lead to re-infections of BBV's. We will use a platform of data sharing, group discussions, lived experience examples and models of best practice to share with colleagues.