

PEER LED HARM REDUCTION SERVICE DELIVERS SIGNIFICANTLY BETTER OUTCOMES IN HEPATITIS C PREVENTION AND TREATMENT

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Background:

Genuine peer models are the exception in harm reduction services in Australia. In spite of a commitment to community partnership in New South Wales, there are few services with identified peer roles that provide harm reduction and hepatitis C (HCV) treatment. The exception is the NSW Users and AIDS Association (NUAA), which delivers HCV treatment support and needle and syringe program (NSP) services.

Description of model of care:

The NUAA NSP is a fixed-site service located in inner Sydney staffed by peer workers and volunteers. From 2015, the service doubled its opening hours and embarked on the expansion and development of the volunteer program. NSP workers and volunteers have specialist training in referrals, brief interventions, harm reduction and hepatitis C treatment support. The NSP offers a clinical service and a peer navigation service for people wishing to take part in hepatitis C treatment.

Effectiveness:

The NUAA NSP is demonstrably more effective than other NSP services in NSW. Over the past three years, occasions of service have increased by 100% while distribution of sterile injecting equipment has increased by over 50%. A state-wide NSP survey has shown that while the NUAA NSP client base is more marginalised than in comparable services, receptive syringe sharing is significantly lower than the rest of NSW with 15.2% of attendees having used equipment after a peer in the previous month compared to 20.3% for the rest of the state. Likewise, the percentage of attendees who have taken up treatment for hepatitis C in the previous year was over 45% compared to 20% in the rest of the state. These results have been replicated across multiple surveys and demonstrate that peer-delivered services are highly effective and the NUAA service model should be replicated throughout the state.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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