

The value of a peer and clinical partnership to facilitate hepatitis C healthcare access in priority settings

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Background

In order to reach the hepatitis C elimination goals in Australia, attention needs to be paid to addressing the unique challenges in accessing healthcare faced by priority populations. The *Live Hep C Free* program is Hepatitis NSW's peer-based facilitated healthcare access and clinical support program that is a highly effective part of elimination efforts.

Standard hep C healthcare model

- 1 Make appointment at GP.
- 2 Attend appointment. Get antibody test (possibly off-site).
- 3 Go back for results. If positive, get PCR blood test.
- 4 Come back for PCR test results.
- 5 If positive, more bloods for treatment (again, possibly off-site).
- 6 Make FibroScan appointment.
- 7 Attend FibroScan appointment.
- 8 Return to GP, pick-up 2 or 3 prescriptions.
- 9 Get each prescription filled.
- 10 Make 12 week post-treatment appointment.
- 11 Attend 12 week post-treatment appointment. Get bloods done.
- 12 Make and follow-up appointment to see if SVR achieved.
- 13 Attend follow-up appointment to see if SVR achieved.
- 14 Cured.

Live Hep C Free model

- 1 Attend service (e.g. methadone clinic) as normal, get PCR blood test and FibroScan while there.
 - 2 Attend service next week as normal, get prescriptions for treatment or get the all-clear.
 - 3 Get each prescription filled.
 - 4 Attend service as normal for 12 week post-treatment bloods.
 - 5 Attend service as normal following week to see if SVR achieved.
 - 6 Cured.
- Person also receives on-treatment support from a peer and a nurse, a more hep C aware service, regular follow-up, and reminders.

Methods

Making hep C testing and treatment as easy-to-access and on-the-spot as possible is critical to increasing uptake of hep C healthcare. The *Live Hep C Free* program does this by partnering hepatology nurses with experienced, trained, and paid peer workers in methadone clinics, homelessness services, residential rehabs, and other priority settings. The aim of the program is to bring hep C healthcare to people which opens up opportunities to access hep C testing and treatment where it would not otherwise exist. The peer worker then provides a supportive and facilitated bridge into the on-site healthcare for people who might already have considerable barriers to accessing the care they need.

Results

- **124** visits have been made by peers to a priority service over the last 12 months.
- **2,221** people have been engaged with about hep C and encouraged to access the nurse in these visits.
- **695** of these engagements have led to a person seeing our on-site partner hep C nurse.
- **379** of those seen have had screening for hep C (either a FibroScan, blood test, or both).
- **169** people have then accessed hepatitis C treatment.
- **79** people had on-treatment or post-treatment support (January - June 2019 only).

- **303** people have been referred on for further healthcare such as for existing cirrhosis or other health conditions.

“Much better interactions. By the time they see me they understand the context and purpose of the clinic, how it may be useful to them and what to expect when they access it. Patients are more engaged and relaxed.” *Hep C nurse*

Live Hep C Free program's spread of peers across NSW

Sydney LHD	South East Sydney LHD	North Sydney LHD	Western Sydney LHD	South West Sydney LHD	Nepean Blue Mountains LHD	West NSW LHD	Far West LHD	Southern NSW LHD	Murrumbidgee LHD	Illawarra Shoalhaven LHD	Central Coast LHD	Hunter New England LHD	Mid-North Coast LHD	Northern NSW LHD
6 peers Lilyfield Glebe x2 Waterloo St Peters Dulwich Hill	1 peer Peakhurst	0* peers *Serviced by other Sydney peers	2 peers Parklea, Blacktown	1 peer Campbelltown	1 peer Cranebrook	2 peers Orange Bathurst	1 peer Broken Hill	1 peer Bungendore	1 peer Walla Walla	2 peers Nowra, Towradgi	1 peer Ourimbah	4 peers Hamilton Inverell Armidale Branxton	4 peers Coffs Harbour x2 Port Macquarie x2	1 peer Lismore



The *Live Hep C Free* program is a truly collaborative partnership process between the peer and the clinical partner, utilising both of their expertise to meet the hep C healthcare needs of clients.

“Peer workers are integral in the delivery of HCV services and provide information and education to clients who might otherwise not be reached by nurses.” *Hep C nurse*

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Conclusion

The long-term aim of regular, consistent peer support and on-site hepatitis healthcare is service-based micro elimination of hepatitis C. By providing immediate and simplified access to on-site healthcare, *Live Hep C Free* helps alleviate the difficulty some people face in navigating the health system by meeting people where they're at with the healthcare they need.