

CHANGING THE CONVERSATION IN THE YARD

- Education to facilitate HCV treatment scale up in prisons

Authors: Wright T, Bearpark R, Heslop A

Background

Prevalence of Hepatitis C (HCV) is highest in correctional centres than the broader community. As such, state and national strategies recognise people in custody are a priority focus.

The Hepatitis In Prison Elimination (HIPE) Program aim to achieve virtual elimination* at 12 NSW Correctional Centres.

The program's success relied on HCV health promotion events engaging people in correctional centres to improve HCV health literacy, encourage testing, build harm reduction skills, and address discrimination.

JH&FMH, HNSW and NUAA launched each HIPE with a health promotion event aimed to involve the centre's whole population in the goal of HCV elimination. Except for three centres where JH&FMH delivered the health promotion event independently.

Methods

Health promotion events were facilitated education sessions delivered in collaboration with NUAA, HNSW and JH&FMH. Large or small groups were conducted over 1-2 days and in consultation with the correctional centre.

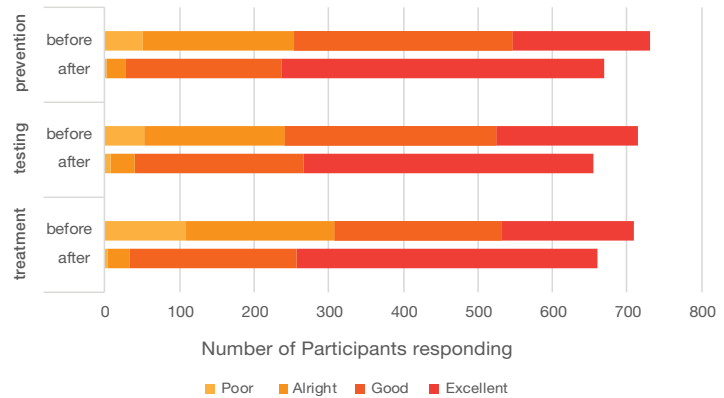
The interactive sessions included information on HCV and harm reduction with a story of lived experience. Questions posed help dispel myths and address stigma. A "show bag" of promotional HCV resources incentivised attendance. HCV testing was subsequently offered to the centre's whole population.

Facilitators applied a strength-based approach to program adaptability through robust ongoing program review. This promoted agile content and format development.



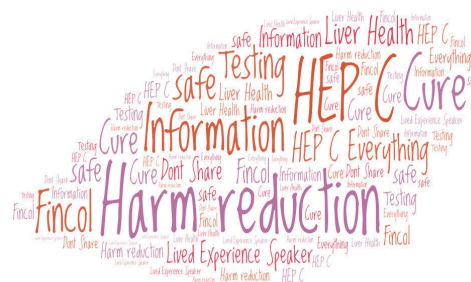
Above: HIPE included an art competition, encouraging ongoing conversations around hepatitis C through participant designed posters displayed within centres.

Self-assessed HCV knowledge pre and post education session



Results

- 1000 people engaged in education groups across 12 sites.
- Evaluations indicated huge improvements in HCV knowledge
- Positive feedback received from majority of participants
- HCV testing uptake approximately 89% at each centre
- The average overall rating for the health promotion was 4.5 out of 5.
- Smaller confidential group sessions primarily showcasing a lived experience and allowing semi structured group discussion were received well by participants.



Above: Collated comments "what's the most useful thing you got from"

Conclusion

An enabled environment was encouraged with a whole of centre approach to health promotion, empowering participants to better health outcomes through HCV testing and treatment uptake, built collective knowledge, prevention strategies, and reducing stigma.

The lived experience speakers were perceived as trustworthy by people in NSW prisons and further HCV peer education opportunities should be explored.

* Due to the high number of movements through correctional centres and the high probability of someone living with HCV transferring into a centre, the term 'elimination' in this context is considered to be 'virtual elimination'.



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