

Postcards from prison: creating partnerships and innovative health promotion during COVID.

Background/ Approach:

Hepatitis C prevalence is estimated at 30% of the 13,466 people in NSW prisons, and is 60% amongst those who inject while in custody. Hence, there are approximately 4,040 people living with hepatitis C (HCV) in prison.

Being in prison is a risk factor in of itself for HCV. This raises questions around exposure to viral hepatitis in custodial environments and how best to support people when released and returning to family and community.

People in prison have friends and family who might not be linked into services or have access to information and support around HCV.

"Postcards out of the packs are being mailed out to family and friends within the first 2 weeks of incarceration which led to conversations about postcards and information gained from the HST training." SAPO Feedback

What

A Health Promotion mindfulness colouring in postcard kit with HCV information for people in prison to enjoy and post to family and friends.

Aim to

- Promote Hepatitis NSW's (HNSW) free support services available to communities in and out of custody.
- Create a link between community members already accessing HNSW resources in custody and their networks who might not have access to HNSW support and information.
- Engage our communities in health promotion messages through creative activities and friendly accessible calls to action.
- Provide our community members with letter writing materials and fun pencil cases approved by Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW).
- Create opportunities to support CSNSW programs and staff initiatives.



Packing day fun!

Method

Hepatitis C health promotion design workshops were held with communities affected: people attending programs in residential rehabs, community corrections and the Compulsory Drug Treatment Correctional Centre.

Focus group results supported the Postcards from Prison Project and health promotion kit offering friendly, non-clinical support and clinical referrals using fun and creative activities, which meets the expressed needs of people in custody for letter writing.

It recognises people in custody have children, partners, friends, family, and a networked life outside of gaol.

CSNSW supported the project, approved the content and materials for distribution throughout all NSW correctional centres. CSNSW also agreed to assist with distribution to the entire NSW inmate population.

Justice Health & Forensic Mental Health Network have a long-standing partnership with HNSW and offer a liaison service for patients and The Network clinicians through the prison phone line – one of the services listed.



Pack contents

- Hepatitis C information,
- A set of postcards with mindfulness colouring-in images, health promotion messages, a call-to-action, and Hepatitis NSW Infoline number,
- One postcard is written as if sent by Hepatitis NSW listing free practical support services,
- Colouring pencils,
- Tx magazine,
- A pencil case/document folder.

Challenge

COVID-19 disrupted manufacturing and distribution with timelines pushed back by 6 months. The 10,000 packs were assembled by two instead of the usual volunteer team. Fortuitously, distribution then coincided with Hepatitis Awareness Week and tight restriction in custody providing activities during lockdown.

Distribution

The packs were offered through CSNSW programs including Health Survival Tips (HSTs) training (a short health promotion workshop focusing on preventing blood-borne viruses and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in prison). Service and Program Officers (SAPOs) deliver the HSTs training, many using the packs as an incentive for people to attend and engage.

Outcome/results

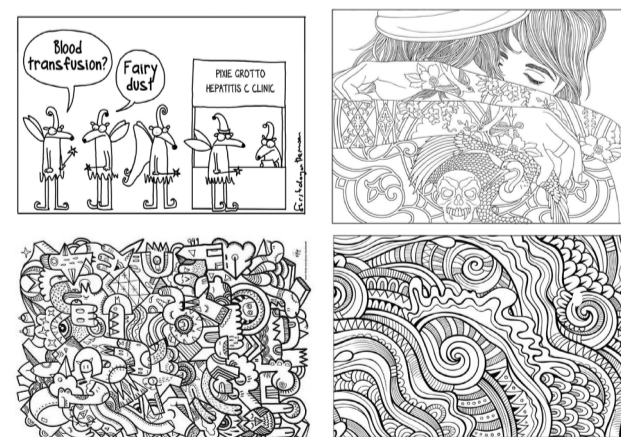
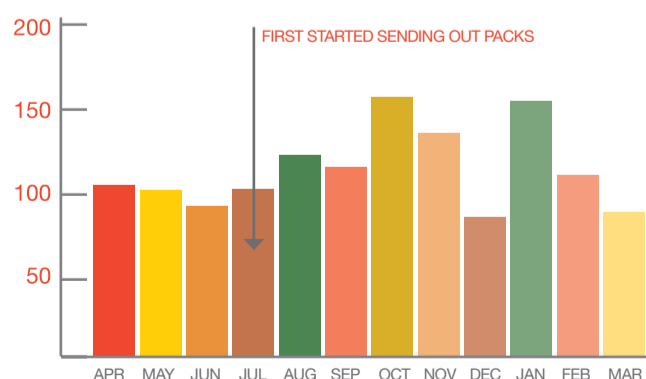
10,000 packs were distributed in 36 prisons through Corrective Services programs.

Half the SAPOs surveyed used packs to incentivise and increase attendance to health education programs. The other half distributed during COVID lockdowns and to people in quarantine.

Demand outstripped supply with Infoline calls and requests for the pack increasing, creating opportunities to better engage more callers and create new partnerships with Corrective Services Programs.

Over 60% of SAPOs surveyed reported moderate to high increase of interest in HCV prevention and treatment.

Number of prison calls from April 2020



Postcard designs sent in the packs