

Ensuring community voices are heard during a pandemic

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Community voices

Hepatitis NSW’s Speaker Service gives individuals affected by viral hepatitis the opportunity to describe their experience of living with hepatitis C or hepatitis B to participants attending clinical training, health workshops, or community education events.

Participants develop an understanding of how stigma and discrimination impact on access to healthcare and support services. This has been shown to be an extremely effective strategy in improving attitudes, values, and behaviours of the healthcare workforce.



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“The main problems I’ve had with stigma have been from medical professionals, unfortunately... I’ve never felt treated unprofessionally by them, but I’ve been uncomfortable.”

Gren R.

“Thanks so much. Gren’s story was brilliant, I’m really glad I got to hear it.”

Michelle
Project Officer, ASHM
Hepatitis C in Primary Care Workshop
15 October 2020

Production

During early stages of the pandemic and lockdown, speakers prepared scripts based on their in-person presentations. They outlined their lived experience of hepatitis C, stigma and discrimination, treatment, and cure. A session was arranged to video them presenting direct to camera; this was done in person within COVID-19 safety guidelines.

From each recording, a seven minute video - with titles and subtitles - was produced. The video was then available under licence. Being pre-recorded ensured messages were on point and that technology issues would not impact the quality of the presentation. Speakers were paid for their script and recording session, and then for each screening. Following the playing of the video in a workshop or event, Speakers were available online to answer any questions from participants.

With training in, and comfort of, using the Zoom platform, Speakers were also able to appear and present live at workshops using their own equipment and internet connections. This was especially of benefit where a Speaker lived outside Sydney.

COVID-19 impact

Pandemic mandated community and travel lock-downs from April 2020 meant Speaker engagements were cancelled, along with most in-person education sessions. Organisations pivoted to deliver their training and events online. Hepatitis NSW determined that it was essential for community voices to still be heard.

In collaboration with our Speakers we initially produced a suite of digital, pre-recorded presentations.

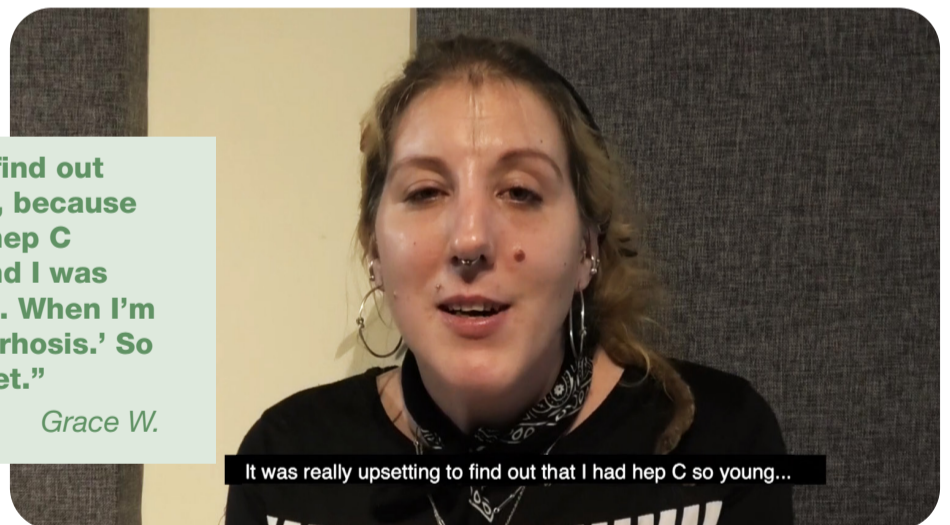
As the adoption of digital and online sessions broadened, we trained our Speakers to also present live, via their own equipment and connections.

“James was an inspiring speaker who answered questions with confidence. His contribution to our course was invaluable, with course participants thanking him for sharing his story and helping them to understand the experience of someone living with hepatitis C, how they as healthcare workers can make a difference, and the impact that a cure from hepatitis C has on someone’s life.”

Phoebe Schroder
Senior Project Officer, ASHM

“It was really upsetting to find out that I had hep C so young, because I knew the longer you have hep C the more damage it does. And I was thinking, ‘Crikey! I’m only 20. When I’m 70 I’m going to have liver cirrhosis.’ So yeah, I was really, really upset.”

Grace W.



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Outcomes

Since the start of the pandemic, Hepatitis NSW Speakers have spoken at many workshops - either pre-recorded or live/online - to varied audiences. Using technology in this manner, during a period of restricted physical access, ensured not only that people from our community continued to be seen and heard, but that people training to work with affected communities were hearing about important real life experiences.

Disclosure of Interest Statement

Hepatitis NSW is funded by the NSW Ministry of Health.



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