

THE STRENGTH OF LIVED EXPERIENCE

Peer workers engage over 20,000 community members to assist with accessible hep C healthcare

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Introduction

Through a range of peer-based programs, Hepatitis NSW has prioritised the training and employment of lived experience peer workers to engage community members in partnership with local health teams. Hepatitis NSW's commitment to collaborative lived experience peer programs underpins our continuous accomplishments in community engagement and service delivery.



Background

Since 2017, Hepatitis NSW's Peer Partnership Program has facilitated lived experience peer worker promotion of hep C testing, treatment and awareness. Through extensive partnerships with local health districts (LHDs) and various organisations, peers engage community in settings which bring healthcare to the community. Hepatitis NSW peer workers also lead communities of practice and participate in ongoing professional development or skill-sharing opportunities.

Description

Utilising the strength of lived experience, peer workers meet people where they're at, providing non-stigmatised access to hepatitis healthcare. This creates enhanced connections and outcomes between community experience and clinical service delivery. Through promoting the value of lived experience, Hepatitis NSW peers have engaged over 20,000 people, while supporting health partners in meeting hep C elimination goals. The strength of lived experience, deployed through professional peer workers, provides a cascade of care which is highly effective and connective in reaching priority populations who have higher prevalence or risk factors for hep C exposure and transmission.

Outcomes and Impacts

As the first point of healthcare provision, peer worker engagement has led to nearly 9,000 people seeing a clinician and over 7,000 receiving some form of hep C test. The impacts of this cascade of care are significant. Community members recognise lived experience peer workers as people to be trusted and who they have an easy rapport with. This leads to increased health literacy, including awareness of effective Direct Acting Antiviral hep C treatments and the right to be treated without discrimination or stigma when accessing healthcare and in general everyday life.

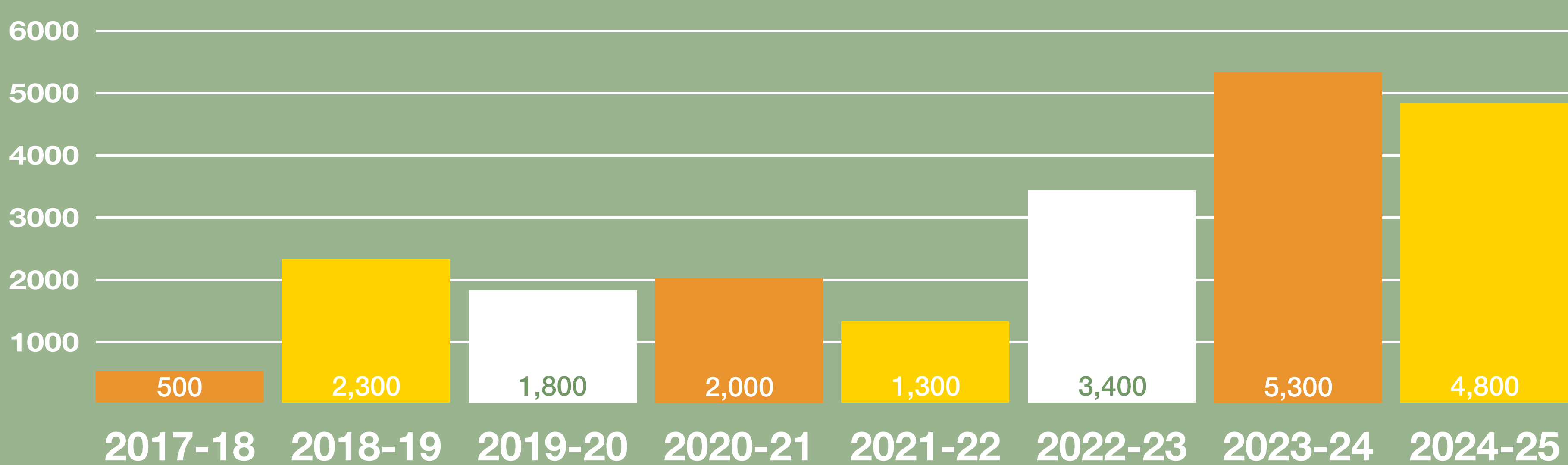
The benefits of employing lived experience experts alongside health teams are demonstrated not only through increased community engagements and ensuing service delivery, but also from the responses of the health partners involved.

"Peers have very effectively engaged people who were hesitant to test. They have also brought a *safe...energy* when there is mistrust of health professionals."

"A peer worker was *pivotal* in engaging in conversation with someone who had tested positive ... to commence treatment- there was a *clear barrier* as a healthcare professional that the peer was able to address."

This feedback from our program partners clearly shows the strength and effectiveness of lived experience workers in engaging community to effect greater health outcomes and better realised service delivery.

COMMUNITY MEMBERS ENGAGED 2017-2025



Conclusion

Growing representation of lived experience peers ensures meaningfully inclusive service delivery to our communities. With peer participation increasingly recognised as fundamental to service provision, Hepatitis NSW's peer-based programs achieve outcomes greatly enhanced by lived experience peer workers. Peer-based programs maintain and expand relevancy through the strength of engaged lived expertise.