**PEER SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH HEPATITIS C IN DRUG AND ALCOHOL SETTINGS INCREASES HEP C ASSESSMENT AND KNOWLEDGE**

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**Background:** The Australian Government funded hepatitis C treatment with direct acting antivirals to all people living with chronic hepatitis C (HCV) in March 2016. The commitment of significant health funding ($1 billion) to eradicating hepatitis C presents a unique opportunity to engage people who have frequently faced significant barriers accessing treatment in their health. Prior to the release of DAAs, Australia had a relatively weak track record in HCV treatment with rates of about 50% that of comparable countries at 2% per annum and mortality from liver disease increasing sharply. The reasons for poor treatment access in Australia are complex but include high levels of stigma and discrimination experienced by people who currently inject or are on pharmacotherapy when trying to access health services. Peer support has been shown to improve service accessibility in drug and alcohol settings. This paper explores the efficacy of a brief peer support intervention within the new treatment landscape.

**Methods:** The NSW Users and AIDS Association provided peer support for people with chronic HCV in OST and harm reduction services via targeted, weekly groups that aimed to engage service users with treatment and self-care and were part of a broader community mobilisation effort.

**Results:** Between January and April 2016, a Peer Support Worker interacted with 178 people on 223 occasions. A total of 60 people (33%) were referred to further services including medical, nursing, counselling and allied health services. There was a community-wide increase in HCV knowledge of 13.5%.

**Conclusion:** People who currently inject drugs or who access pharmacotherapy services can benefit from peer support by facilitating community engagement in treatment and health care. Although DAAs will make treatment more accessible for many people with chronic HCV, peer support remains an essential component to mobilise the community of people who do or have injected drugs.

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