

SOUTH COAST MEDICAL SERVICE ABORIGINAL CORPORATION: DEVELOPMENT OF A NEEDLE SYRINGE PROGRAM

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Introduction: State and federal hepatitis C strategies focus efforts on working with groups of people that are most at risk or most affected by hepatitis C. Aboriginal people are prioritised in both NSW and Australian hepatitis C strategies and Aboriginal injecting drug users in the NSW HIV Strategy (2012–2015). Aboriginal peoples' vulnerability to hepatitis C is exacerbated by factors such as poorer access to primary health care, homelessness and over-representation within the Australian prison system. The South Coast Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS) in New South Wales works to improve access to health-care for Aboriginal people by providing holistic primary health care and other health related services, including improving equity of access to mainstream services.

Methods: A formal consultation process commenced early 2014 with key stakeholders to determine support and feasibility for the development of Needle Syringe Program. Challenges and concerns were identified during this process. These were addressed through the development of an Operation Plan of Management and monitoring and review processes which were developed in-line with relevant strategies and other evidenced-based material.

Results: As part of this service, three models were established in 2015. (1) In-service cupboard, (2) opportunistic deliveries from vehicles and (3.) an Automatic Dispensing machine (ADM). Following the implementation of the NSP, ongoing support and training has been put in place. This is ensured through the Operational Plan of Management and delivered by staff within the Local Health District.

Conclusion: This project applied a community development approach to developing a NSP service delivery model that was built on the needs and meaningful input of community. Through developing three different models of service delivery based on the needs of community, this project has contributed to improving health equity for Aboriginal people and addressing broader issues of shame and stigma associated with hepatitis.