

STIGMA AMONG PEOPLE LIVING WITH HEPATITIS C AND PEOPLE WHO INJECT DRUGS IN AUSTRALIA

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Introduction: Stigma has major health and social impact on people living with hepatitis C virus (PLHCV) and people who inject drugs (PWID). Although Australia's national hepatitis C strategy contains the objective to reduce the negative impact of stigma and discrimination on people's health, until recently there has been no system in place to monitor experiences among PLHCV and PWID.

Methods: As part of a national project funded by the Australian Government, we established the first system to monitor stigma among people living with blood borne viruses and sexually transmitted infections in Australia, including hepatitis C and HIV, and among key priority groups, such as PWID and men who have sex with men. This process included development of a brief indicator of stigma to measure experiences of stigma across multiple infections and priority groups, as well as a mirrored indicator to measure the expression of stigma in health care settings.

Results: In this presentation we will outline the process of developing the stigma indicator, and the implications of this work in relation to the national strategy addressing hepatitis C and among the key risk group of PWID. This work is important, as a valid and reliable indicator will allow for monitoring of changes of stigma over time, including its expression in various settings (particularly health care) and the impact on PLHCV and PWID.

Conclusion: This is the first time that a national government has committed to addressing the role of stigma in its national response to hepatitis C, and among the key risk group of PWID. Development of an indicator is important to monitor progress against the strategic objective to eliminate the negative impact of stigma and discrimination on people's health. Being able to quantify experiences of stigma is the first step toward introducing strategies to eliminate its effects.

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