Hepatitis C Prevalence Plunges Among Australians Who Inject Drugs

Australia has led the world in an aggressive push to provide its citizens with low-cost treatment for the virus.

August 1, 2019 By Benjamin Ryan

The proportion of Australian people who inject drugs (PWID) who have hepatitis C virus (HCV) plunged by 60% between 2015 and 2018. That is according to a new report from the Kirby Institute at the University of New South Wales in Sydney that analyzed data regarding PWID using Australia's needle and syringe programs (NSPs).

The nation's Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) began covering direct-acting antiviral (DAA) treatment for the virus in 2016. In 2015, about half of PWID in the nation had hep C. Three years later, just one in five still had the virus. Kirby Institute researchers attribute this dramatic shift to the high use of DAAs among PWID across Australia.

"People who inject drugs are the major population at risk of hepatitis C in Australia, and, thanks to forward-thinking and inclusive leadership from the federal government, people are able to access the cures at a low cost through the PBS," the Kirby Institute's Jenny Iversen, PhD, lead author of the report, said in a press release. "Since these new treatments were added to the PBS, our report shows the number of people attending NSPs ever treated for hepatitis C has increased from 11% to 55%."

The dramatic reduction in the prevalence of HCV among PWID has reduced by more than half the risk of transmission of the virus through the sharing of drug paraphernalia.

Australia is hoping that the nation's aggressive push to provide low-cost DAA treatment will make it the first country in the world to eliminate HCV.

"Many countries are looking to Australia as the ideal setting to achieve hepatitis C elimination," said Greg Dore, PhD, MPH, head of the Kirby Institute's Viral Hepatitis Clinical Research Program. "The focus on providing access to all, with more than 70,000 people now cured, together with specific initiatives for marginalized populations, means that people who inject drugs are equal recipients of these amazing advances."

To read a press release about the study, click here.

To read the report, click here.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

http://beta.docker.hepmag.com/article/hepatitis-c-prevalence-plunges-among-australians-inject-drugs