

# THE NSW DRIED BLOOD SPOT TESTING PILOT



## AN ESSENTIAL PERSON-CENTRED OPTION TO IMPROVE HEPATITIS C AND HIV TESTING

### WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

- **130,000<sup>1</sup>** people are living with hepatitis C infection
  - **29,000<sup>2</sup>** people are living with HIV infection
  - **2,610<sup>3</sup>** people were living with undiagnosed HIV infection in 2020
- Australia needs to increase testing to achieve World Health Organization's 2030 hepatitis C and HIV elimination goals
  - Testing barriers include stigma and discrimination, limited access to services, off-site pathology, language, and culture



### WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

With testing and treatment both decreasing, we urgently need testing models that are flexible and person-centred. Dried blood spot (DBS) testing is a safe, private, and confidential solution.



Simple finger prick test



Reduces number of visits for diagnosis, improving linkage to care



Performed at home ([dbstest.health.nsw.gov.au](http://dbstest.health.nsw.gov.au)) or via health services



DBS testing is ideal for prisons as it can test large populations quickly, with limited clinical space



Results delivered via phone or in person

### KEY OUTCOMES OF THE NSW DBS TESTING PILOT (Nov 2016 - Dec 2020)



**10,000+** registrations for a DBS test



**64%** of online registrations returned a sample to the lab for testing



**8,696** tests completed



**29%** of people tested were from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds



**7,392** unique people tested



**TAKE HOME KITS**  
DBS home testing offered a viable testing alternative during COVID-19 lockdowns

## HEPATITIS C & HIV KEY OUTCOMES



### TESTS COMPLETED

**6,573** Hepatitis C  
**8,600+** HIV



**878** active hepatitis C infections  
**10** new HIV infections



### UNIQUE PEOPLE TESTED

**5,960** Hepatitis C  
**6,922** HIV



**15%** returned a positive hepatitis C RNA result



### PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE TESTED WHO HAD NOT TESTED IN TWO YEARS PRIOR

**45%** Hepatitis C  
**51%** HIV

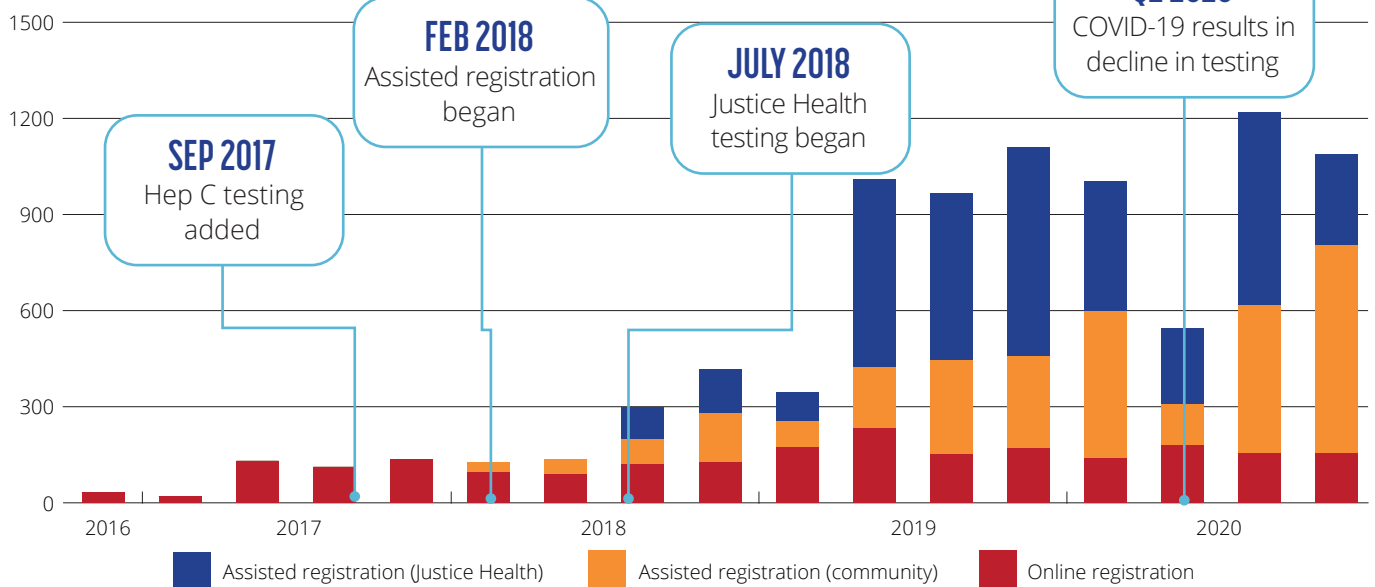


**45%** of people diagnosed with hepatitis C initiated treatment within six months



**61%** of people in prison diagnosed with hepatitis C initiated treatment within six months

## TESTING OVER TIME



## KEY POINTS

- DBS testing can reach people who may not have tested in a traditional setting
- High return rate for people registering online
- In prisons, DBS allows large numbers of people to be tested and reduces burden on staff
- Study and site staff supported linkage to care, so that 45% of people with a positive hepatitis C result initiated treatment within six months
- DBS testing was an important strategy when traditional health services were not available due to COVID-19



## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Advocacy is urgently required to encourage diagnostic companies to register DBS with the TGA
- Ensure the national HIV and HCV strategies include innovative/non-traditional testing methods to increase testing and national and WHO elimination goals can be met



1. Kwon, et al. Australia Could Miss the WHO Hepatitis C Virus Elimination Targets Due to Declining Treatment Uptake and Ongoing Burden of Advanced Liver Disease Complications. PLOS ONE 2021;16(9): e0257369 - 130,000 people are living with hepatitis C infection 2 & 3. The Kirby Institute. HIV, hepatitis and STIs in Australia National surveillance data website (2020) <https://data.kirby.unsw.edu.au/> [last accessed: 23 February 2022] - 29,002 people are living with HIV infection and 2,610 people were living with undiagnosed HIV infection in 2020

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