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Research Paper

# It's Your Right – implementation and outcomes of a co-designed national Australian hepatitis C health promotion campaign

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## Highlights

- *It's Your Right* was the first national Australian hepatitis C health promotion campaign to be co-designed and implemented by peer workers with lived-living experience of injecting drug use and/or hepatitis C.
- *It's Your Right* combined a national social marketing campaign with localised peer-led engagement activities to reach people who inject drugs, people who were not already linked to hepatitis C services, people with unstable housing, and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander People.
- Without control/comparison data, reach data and engagement data were analysed to assess the campaign outcomes.
- During the campaign >8.9 million people in Australia saw at least one campaign social marketing asset, and clients of implementing organisations demonstrated high unprompted (53 % of survey participants) and prompted (72 % of survey participants) recall of the campaign.
- During the campaign, at implementing organisations there were 2595 documented conversations about hepatitis C, 1343 hepatitis C tests, 151 referrals for treatment, and 1254 financial incentives were used to engage clients in hepatitis C care.

## Abstract

## Background

In 2022, an estimated 74,400 people in Australia were living with hepatitis C. Despite an initial rapid uptake of direct acting antiviral treatment after their approval for use in Australia in 2016, national hepatitis C testing and treatment rates have declined since 2019. In response, *It's Your Right*, a national health promotion campaign co-designed with and for people with lived-experience of injecting drug use and/or hepatitis C, was implemented in all Australian states and territories in 2022. This article presents outcomes of the campaign.

## Methods

A mixed methods evaluation was co-designed with peer workers from peer-led drug user organisations and community-based hepatitis organisations. Campaign outcomes included analysis of social marketing reach data, hepatitis C testing and treatment data, and client survey.

## Results

*It's Your Right* demonstrated wide reach with >8.9 million people seeing the campaign. The campaign was memorable - 53 % of clients from the implementing organisations who were surveyed demonstrated unprompted campaign recall, while 72 % remembered the campaign when prompted. Implementing organisations documented 2595 conversations about hepatitis C with clients, conducted 1343 hepatitis C tests, referred 151 people for treatment, and utilised 1254 incentives to engage clients in hepatitis C care during the campaign period. Thirty-eight percent of survey participants spoke to a peer worker, and 31 % accessed testing, due to seeing the campaign.

## Conclusion

*It's Your Right* was highly valued by implementing organisations and reached people in the community who inject drugs. The campaign inspired people to seek out support from peer workers and take up hepatitis C testing.

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## Introduction

Direct acting antivirals to treat hepatitis C were approved for use and included in the Australian Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme in 2016 (Therapeutic Goods Administration, 2016, Dec 19). This led to rapid initial uptake of treatment among people with chronic hepatitis C infection, which exceeded treatment levels needed to meet Australian elimination targets (Scott et al., 2020). This initial rapid uptake was largely seen in higher socioeconomic areas and major cities, and prescribing was high among gastroenterologists, hepatologists and infectious disease specialists (Scott et al., 2020). This indicates that this rapid initial uptake may have been mainly among people already engaged in hepatitis C care, and those with easier access to health services. By 2019, rates of hepatitis C testing and treatment uptake in Australia were declining (Burnet Institute & Kirby Institute, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a further decline in testing due to people at

risk of hepatitis C being unable to engage with health services (Traeger et al., 2022). In 2022 there were an estimated 74,400 people with chronic hepatitis C in Australia, and treatment uptake had fallen below the threshold needed to meet Australia's hepatitis C elimination targets (Burnet Institute & Kirby Institute, 2023).

In response to declines in testing and treatment, the Eliminate C Australia National Partnership (ECA), as part of the Burnet Institute, partnered with the Australian Injecting and Illicit Drug Users League (AIVL; <https://aivl.org.au/>) to develop a health promotion campaign that would reach people that had not been reached by the national response to hepatitis C. The campaign was funded by the Paul Ramsey Foundation, which funded ECA and the Australian Government Department of Health as part of the public education campaigns pillar of the National Hepatitis C Finding 50,000 Project (Hepatitis Australia, 2024).

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## Section snippets

### The *It's Your Right* campaign

The *It's Your Right* campaign was developed to support peer-led drug user organisations (DUOs), and community-based hepatitis organisations, to increase their peer outreach activities and engage people who inject drugs who were not linked to services providing hepatitis C testing and treatment. To develop the campaign, the Burnet Institute and AIVL co-convened a National Reference Group (NRG) to coordinate and co-design the campaign using a peer-led approach from inception to delivery and ...

### Methods

The outcomes of the *It's Your Right* campaign were evaluated through a mixed methods approach. The evaluation used social marketing campaign reach data, data on client linkage to testing and treatment from implementing organisations, and a mixed methods survey of clients of implementing organisations on their recall of, and response to, the campaign. The questions and plan for the campaign evaluation were developed by the NRG through the campaign co-design workshops – which involved a ...

## National social marketing campaign reach

The estimated total reach (total number of people who saw at least one *It's Your Right* advertising asset) of the national out-of-home advertising was >8.9 million people.

Table 2 outlines the available audience reach data for each channel used in the national out-of-home advertising. Due to discrepancies in the availability of data and how advertising reach is calculated between different states, territories and companies, full data sets across all advertising types were not available. ...

## Discussion

This article presents development, implementation and outcomes from *It's Your Right*, the first Australian national hepatitis C health promotion campaign co-designed with peer workers with lived-living experience of injecting drug use. The campaign aimed to increase access to hepatitis C care for people who inject drugs and specifically targeted people who currently inject and/or had a recent history of injecting drugs, people who were not already accessing hepatitis healthcare services, people ...

## Conclusion

The *It's Your Right* campaign was a co-designed, peer-implemented hepatitis C health promotion campaign which combined social marketing with localised peer-led engagement strategies to increase hepatitis C conversations, and to link people who inject drugs to testing and treatment service. The campaign ran in peer-led DUOs and community-based hepatitis C organisations around Australia in 2022. During the three-month campaign 1343 hepatitis C tests were conducted and 151 people were referred for ...

## Ethics approvals

This project was reviewed and approved by the following human research ethics committees:

- Alfred Hospital Ethics Committee (Reference number: 225/22). ...
- Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW (Reference number: 1988/22). ...
- Aboriginal Health Research Ethics Committee (Reference number: 04-22-1006). ...
- Northern Territory Human Research Ethics Committee (Reference number: 2022-4374). ...

- Western Australian Aboriginal Health Ethics Committee (Reference number: HREC1184). ...

...

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## Declaration of generative AI use

No generative AI tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript. ...

## CRediT authorship contribution statement

**Louisa Walsh:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Shannon Christensen:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Troy Combo:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Investigation, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Jacqui A. Richmond:** Writing – ...

## Declaration of competing interest

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Alisa Pedrana has received consultancy fees for Gilead Sciences unrelated to this study.

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- 1 Note: Emily Adamson and Alisa Pedrana should be considered co-senior authors on this article.

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