**ENGAGING SUBSTANCE USERS IN ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNING**

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**Introduction:** One of the challenges often raised in working with People Who Inject Drugs (PWID) is unwillingness or inability to participate in advocacy campaigns there may be more pressing priorities in their lives including financial, housing and other concerns. This paper sets out to dispel that myth and provide a way forward for an active involved community of people living with and affected by hepatitis C, which is inclusive of PWID.

**Methods:** This paper describes how hard to reach communities including current and former injecting drug users (IDU) have been engaged in advocacy campaigning specifically in relation to expediting the approval of new treatments for hepatitis C.

**Results:** By providing easy to use tools like online petitions and pro-forma templates Hepatitis NSW has provided a means for members of hard to reach communities to engage in advocacy campaigning. This engagement not only contributes to successful campaign outcomes but may help overcome a sense of powerlessness that people with hepatitis C may feel in relation to their illness. It may lead to greater engagement with their health in general and with the arrival of new treatments, a greater propensity to undertake treatment for hepatitis C.

**Conclusion:** Engaging members of the affected communities in advocacy campaigns is both useful in achieving the objectives of the campaign and helpful in enabling members of affected communities understand that they can influence the agenda on issues which directly affect them.

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