

Meet Them Where They Are

Successful Implementation of Hepatitis C Screening in Clinics for Persons with a Substance Use Disorder, Georgia, USA

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Background & Need

An estimated 2.7–3.9 million Americans have chronic Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) infection, with 50–70% unaware of their status. Outside clinical settings, there is a lack of risk-based HCV testing among key populations, particularly injection drug users (IDUs). With 50-80% of IDUs becoming HCV-infected within five years, targeted testing and treatment approaches are critical to address the syndemic impacts of HCV infection among IDUs.

As many prescription substance users have turned to heroin, heroin-related overdose deaths have more than quadrupled since 2010, with Georgia ranking #6 in heroin-related death rates in 2015.

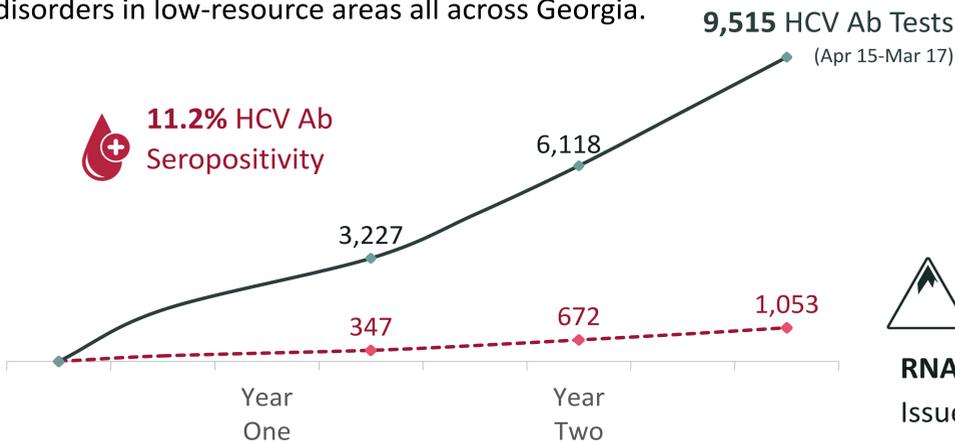
To address this growing issue, Imagine Hope, in partnership with Gilead Sciences and Georgia's Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, expanded its HIV testing program to include HCV. In April 2015, the program paired HCV testing with an already existing robust HIV testing program embedded in programs for persons with a substance use disorder including medication assistance treatment clinics.

HCV antibody (Ab) and RNA confirmatory testing is currently offered in 24 agencies across the state. Three linkage coordinators support chronically infected individuals navigate the journey to care and treatment.



Building a Hepatitis C Testing Program

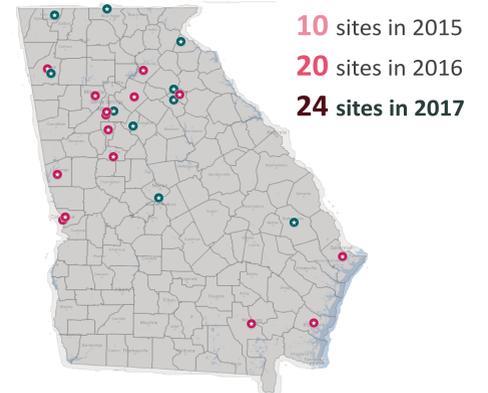
In two short years, the HCV screening program has grown rapidly, reaching individuals with substance use disorders in low-resource areas all across Georgia.



Ms. Barbara, coastal linkage specialist, building partnerships with donuts!



Staff promoting HIV/HCV testing in Clayton County, GA



Reaching High-Priority Populations

74% of Ab+ outside "boomer" screening cohort
24% are under 30 years old

Among Ab+ | 47% women | 89% white | 95% non-Hispanic

Of 1,053 HCV Ab+ clients....

82% received HCV RNA testing

74% were RNA+



43% were linked to HCV Care*

20 clients followed the long road to viral load suppression

- ✓ 5 additional clients have completed DDA, awaiting RNA testing to confirm VLS
- ✓ 22 clients currently receiving treatment, with 10 more approved for medication



Overcoming Challenges

RNA testing

Issue:

Lack of complete RNA testing for Ab+ clients made it difficult to prioritize limited slots for treatment

Our Response:

- ✓ Conduct RNA Testing in-house for all Ab + clients, which helped remove RNA-negative clients from the "long line" of those needing care
- ✓ Use blood drawn Ab testing that will reflex to RNA, which reduced barriers to verifying HCV status

Linkage to Care

Issue:

Lack of care providers & insurance issues were a major roadblock

Our Response:

- ✓ Hire linkage coordinators from the communities they serve
- ✓ Build referral partnerships with healthcare providers
- ✓ Develop support groups, which foster adherence to medical appointments

Specialty Care / Primary Care

Issue:

Limited HCV specialty care clinicians in rural Georgia

Our Response:

- ✓ Refer Clients to Primary Care/FQHCs as a beginning steps to HCV care
- ✓ Build relationship with primary care providers; support them with education and resources
- ✓ Don't wait – get creative!



Samantha - North Georgia Linkage Coordinator



Ms. Yo - Metro Atlanta Linkage Coordinator

*Linkage to care is defined as (1) an in-depth educational session given by a nurse on a patient's diagnosis and steps to treatment, or (2) the completion of medical appointment



Two Years of Success...and Counting

Imagine Hope continues to grow and address the diverse needs of individuals with substance use disorders and Hepatitis C. As of June 30th 2017, the program has...

- ✓ 11,542 clients tested
- ✓ 1,250 AB+ clients
- ✓ 770 RNA + clients
- ✓ 2 more new clinics to be added by end of 2017



The Imagine Hope team celebrating a milestone: 10,000 HCV tests in just over 2 years!

Imagine Hope, Inc. is a consulting firm with expertise in the intersecting fields of addiction, mental health, and infectious disease. We have managed HIV testing in 36 programs for persons with substance use disorders across Georgia on behalf of DBHDD since 1996. Through FOCUS, we have launched Hepatitis C testing in 24 partner agencies. Support for this work is made possible through a partnership with Gilead Sciences and testing support from Georgia's DBHDD. Gilead FOCUS grant only supports testing and linking and does not support HCV treatment.



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