

World Hepatitis Day Advocacy and Training Roundtable: 28th July 2021 Event Brief

Increasing knowledge and driving forward efforts to eliminate viral hepatitis as a public health threat in South Africa.

Event details

Date	Wednesday 28 th July 2021
Time	11am – 1pm (South Africa time) (GMT+2)
Platform	Zoom (participant limit 150)
Hosts	International Network on Health and Hepatitis in Substance Users (INHSU), TB HIV Care, South African Network of People Who Use Drugs (SANPUD), South African National AIDS Council (SANAC), Department of Social Development, National Department of Health, Central Drug Authority

Purpose

An awareness raising event around viral hepatitis and harm reduction among people who use drugs in South Africa.

- Provide an opportunity to highlight the viral hepatitis burden and need for action in South Africa
- Provide information and training on hepatitis B and C virus to a range of stakeholders
- To come together in efforts to advance elimination of viral hepatitis as a public health threat

The issues

There are an estimated 6.1 million people with recent injecting drug use living with HCV infection globally¹. There are an estimated 3.4 million people with hepatitis B infection² and around 400 000 people with hepatitis C infection³ in South Africa.

The WHO has set a goal to eliminate HCV as a global public health threat by 2030⁴, including targets to increase HCV diagnoses and treatment and reduce new infections and liver-related mortality.

Globally, HCV testing and diagnosis remains low⁵ and there are still many barriers to linkage to care⁶. In South Africa, access to HCV testing is limited and costly. Ensuring access to appropriate HCV

¹ Grebely J, et al. Global, regional, and country-level estimates of hepatitis C infection among people who have recently injected drugs. *Addiction* 2019. DOI: [10.1111/add.14393](https://doi.org/10.1111/add.14393).

² South African National Department of Health. National guidelines for the management of viral hepatitis. Pretoria: National Department of Health; 2019.

³ Hecht R, et al. The investment case for hepatitis B and C in South Africa: Adaptation and innovation in policy analysis for disease program scale-up. *Health Policy Plan*. 2018;33(4):528–38.

⁴ WHO. Global health sector strategy on viral hepatitis 2016–2021. Geneva: WHO, 2016.

⁵ Saraswat V, et al. Historical epidemiology of hepatitis C virus (HCV) in select countries - volume 2. *Journal of Viral Hepatitis* 2015; 22 Suppl 1: 6-25. DOI: [10.1111/jvh.12350](https://doi.org/10.1111/jvh.12350)

⁶ Blach S, et al. Impact of COVID-19 on global hepatitis C elimination efforts. *J Hepatol* 2020. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhep.2020.07.042>

diagnostics, including dried blood spot testing and point of care testing in primary care and community settings is vital to increase linkage to care.

Great strides have been made in the treatment of HCV, with direct-acting antiviral (DAA) therapy highly effective and straightforward to administer, yet the burden of HCV remains high and access to DAA therapy is still a barrier in many countries such as South Africa.

Evidence shows that access to interventions such as low-threshold needle and syringe programmes and opioid agonist therapy are essential to reduce hepatitis C incidence and prevalence among people who use drugs⁷⁸, yet harm reduction coverage in South Africa is well below World Health Organization recommended levels.

The Cairo Declaration on Viral Hepatitis in Africa⁹, produced by the Ministers of Health of the African Union Member States, commits to implementation of hepatitis programs, development of budgeted national plans, integration of viral hepatitis care into existing services, raising awareness, ensuring access to hepatitis prevention and treatment services (including comprehensive care for key populations, including people who inject drugs), accelerate access to new diagnostics and medicines.

The call to action

We need coordinated advocacy endeavours and consistent messaging to progress viral hepatitis elimination efforts.

Healthcare provider training initiatives to date have primarily focussed on upskilling practitioners in hepatitis B, and there is a need to increase education and training on hepatitis C.

We must acknowledge and support the vital role that community and civil society groups play in ensuring people are aware of viral hepatitis prevention, testing and treatment. Community groups must be empowered with the knowledge, skills and tools to appropriately educate and support their communities.

In line with the INHSU Africa declaration¹⁰, we call on those working to eliminate hepatitis in the African region to:

- Scale up harm reduction services
- Make health service accessible for people who use drugs
- Support community empowerment and community-based programmes
- Improve access to affordable diagnostics and medicines
- Eliminate stigma, discrimination, and violence against people who use drugs
- Reform drug policies
- Enhance funding for harm reduction approaches and hepatitis elimination efforts

7 Hagan H, Pouget ER, Des Jarlais DC. A systematic review and meta-analysis of interventions to prevent hepatitis C virus infection in people who inject drugs. *The Journal of infectious diseases* 2011; 204(1): 74-83

8 Platt L, Reed J, Minozzi S, et al. Effectiveness of needle/syringe programmes and opiate substitution therapy in preventing HCV transmission among people who inject drugs. *The Cochrane database of systematic reviews* 2016; 2016(1).

9 African Union. Draft Cairo Declaration on Viral Hepatitis in Africa. 2019. https://au.int/sites/default/files/newsevents/workingdocuments/36768-wdsa24616_e_original_declaration_on_viral_hepatitis.pdf2020).

10 African Declaration to Eliminate Hepatitis C and Improve the Health of People who use Drugs. INHSU 2020. https://www.inhsu.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/INHSU-Africa-2020-Declaration_March.pdf

Agenda

Time	Speaker	Topic
11:00am	Chair: Dr Thembisile Xulu, CEO, South African National AIDS Council	Welcome and housekeeping
11:05am (5 mins)	Mr Keketso Mokubane, Gauteng Regional Representative, South African Network of People who Use Drugs	Viral hepatitis and people who use drugs in South Africa
11:10am (5 mins)	Hon. Hendrietta Bogopane-Zulu, Deputy Minister, Department of Social Development (TBC)	Viral hepatitis and the National Drug Master Plan
11:15am (5 mins)	Dr Mathume Joseph Phaahla , Deputy Health Minister, National Department of Health	South Africa's Viral Hepatitis Action Plan
11:20am (5 mins)	Presenter TBC	Political support for infectious disease elimination and attaining the Sustainable development goals
11:25am	Q & A	
11:30am	Screening of Connecting with Care South Africa	
11:45am	Breakout groups to sharing information on viral hepatitis	Break-out group sessions hosted by a clinician and a people who use drugs community representative on viral hepatitis
12:55pm	Chair	Wrap up and thanks

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