

Chronicles of an Epidemic Forthtold: Alarming Increase of HCV and HIV among People Who Inject Drugs in Colombia

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Background

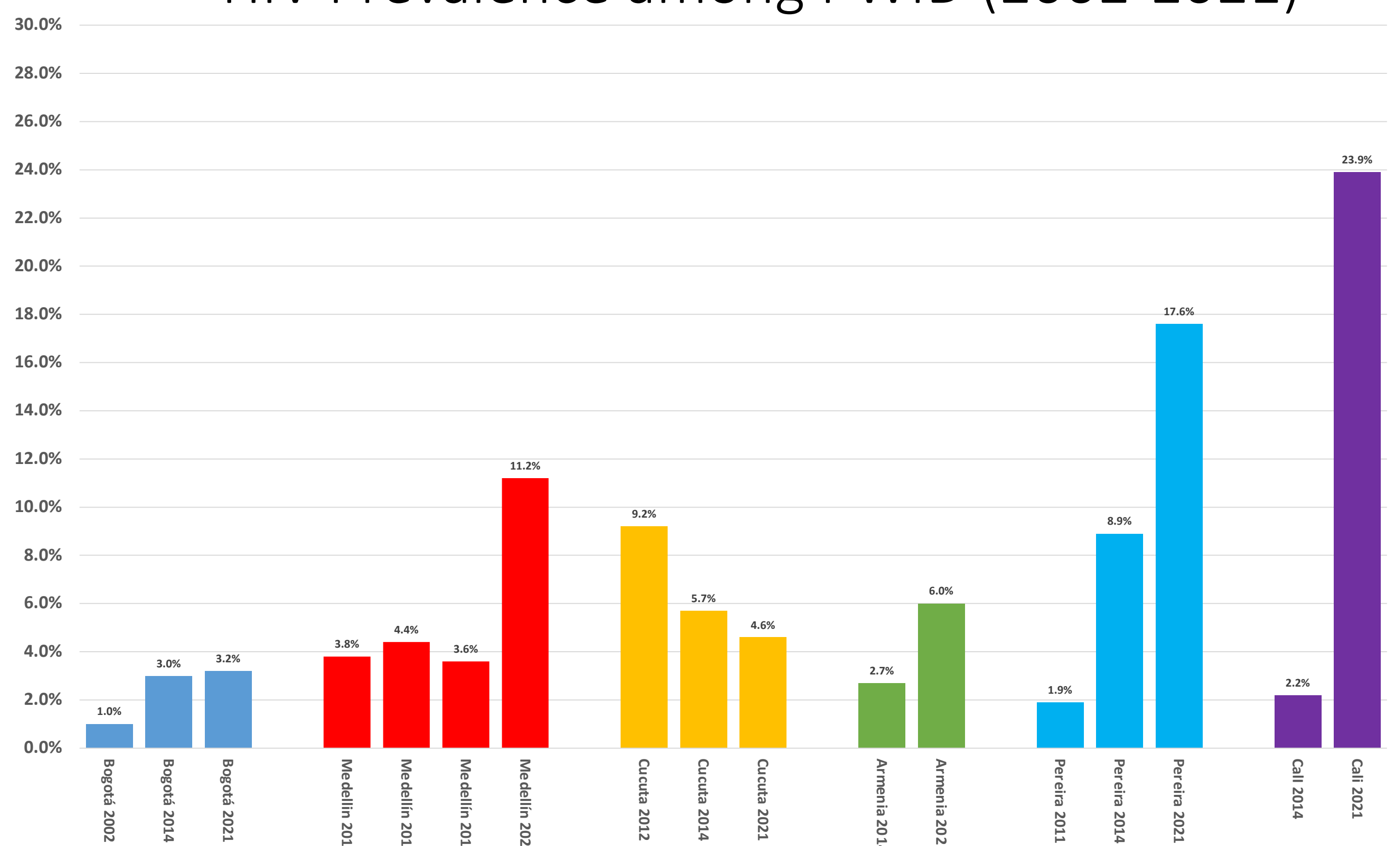
- In Colombia, starting in the early 1990's, illicit drug production diversified to include heroin as well as cocaine.
- Heroin production led to the development of a local market for heroin and the uptake of heroin use among young people.
- While high income countries aim at HCV elimination, HCV (and HIV) among PWID in numerous low- and middle-income countries remain unaddressed and, in the case of Colombia, increasing at an alarming rate.
- Despite numerous warnings by researchers and public health officials few prevention efforts have been implemented.

Methods

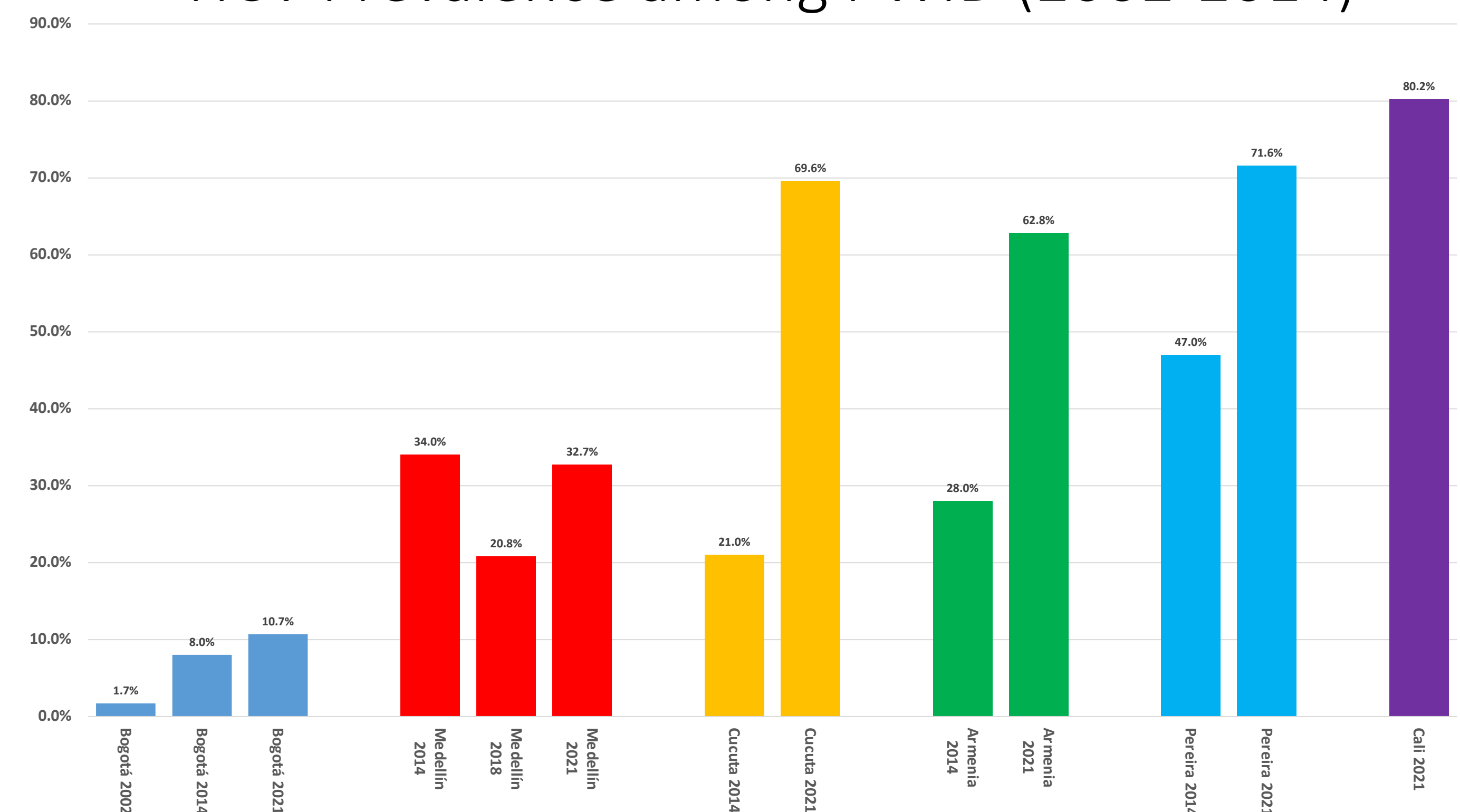
- Secondary analysis of a series of cross-sectional studies across six Colombian cities using respondent-driven sampling of people who inject drugs (PWID) over 18 years of age. HIV and HCV antibody testing were administered on-site.
- Data collection occurred in Medellin and Pereira (years 2010, 2013-14, and 2021) and Bogota, Cucuta, Armenia, and Cali (years 2013-14 and 2021).
- Respondent-driven Sampling (RDS) methodology:
 - RDS is a chain-referral sampling method used to access hard-to-reach populations, such as people who inject drugs (PWID).
 - RDS uses participants' social network ties to obtain a sample that is representative of the study population.

Results

HIV Prevalence among PWID (2002-2021)



HCV Prevalence among PWID (2002-2014)



- The rates of HIV among PWID from 2013 to 2021 have close to double in Pereira (from 8.9 % to 17.6%) and nearly tripled in Medellin (from 4.4% to 11.2%).
- Similarly, the rates of HCV exposure increased drastically in Armenia (from 28% to 62.8%) and Pereira (47% to 71.65%) and more than tripled in Cucuta (from 21% to 69.6%).

Conclusion

- Despite repeated concerns, raised as early as 2006 in national and international forums, the HIV and HCV epidemic has followed a predictable course with minimal implementation of harm reduction efforts that could have prevented its current impact.
- Will this prevention failure serve as a warning to neighboring countries regarding the spread of a drug injection-related HCV/HIV epidemic elsewhere in Latin America?
- What is the responsibility of WHO and other international organizations in preventing forthtold epidemics?

Sources: Ministerio de Justicia y Derecho, Universidad CES. Estudio de prevalencia de VIH, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, Sífilis, y comportamientos asociados en las personas que se inyectan drogas en las ciudades de Armenia y Cúcuta en el 2021. Colombia; 2021.

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