

Pharmacy-based, peer-led HCV testing: a novel, collaborative approach to micro-elimination



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Background & Aims

People who inject drugs (PWID) - including people using opiate substitution therapy (OST) and/or needle and syringe provision (NSP) - often face barriers to accessing healthcare.

Pharmacies providing OST and NSP services offer a chance to engage PWID, but pharmacy-based HCV testing services – including England’s national pharmacy testing service – often have limited success.

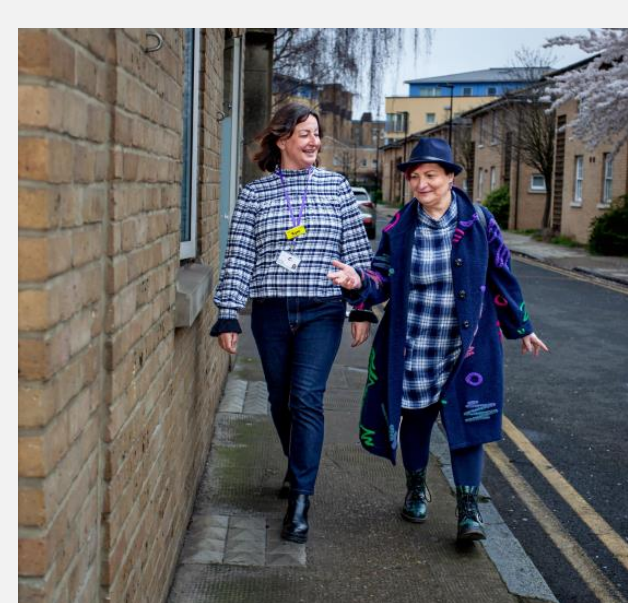
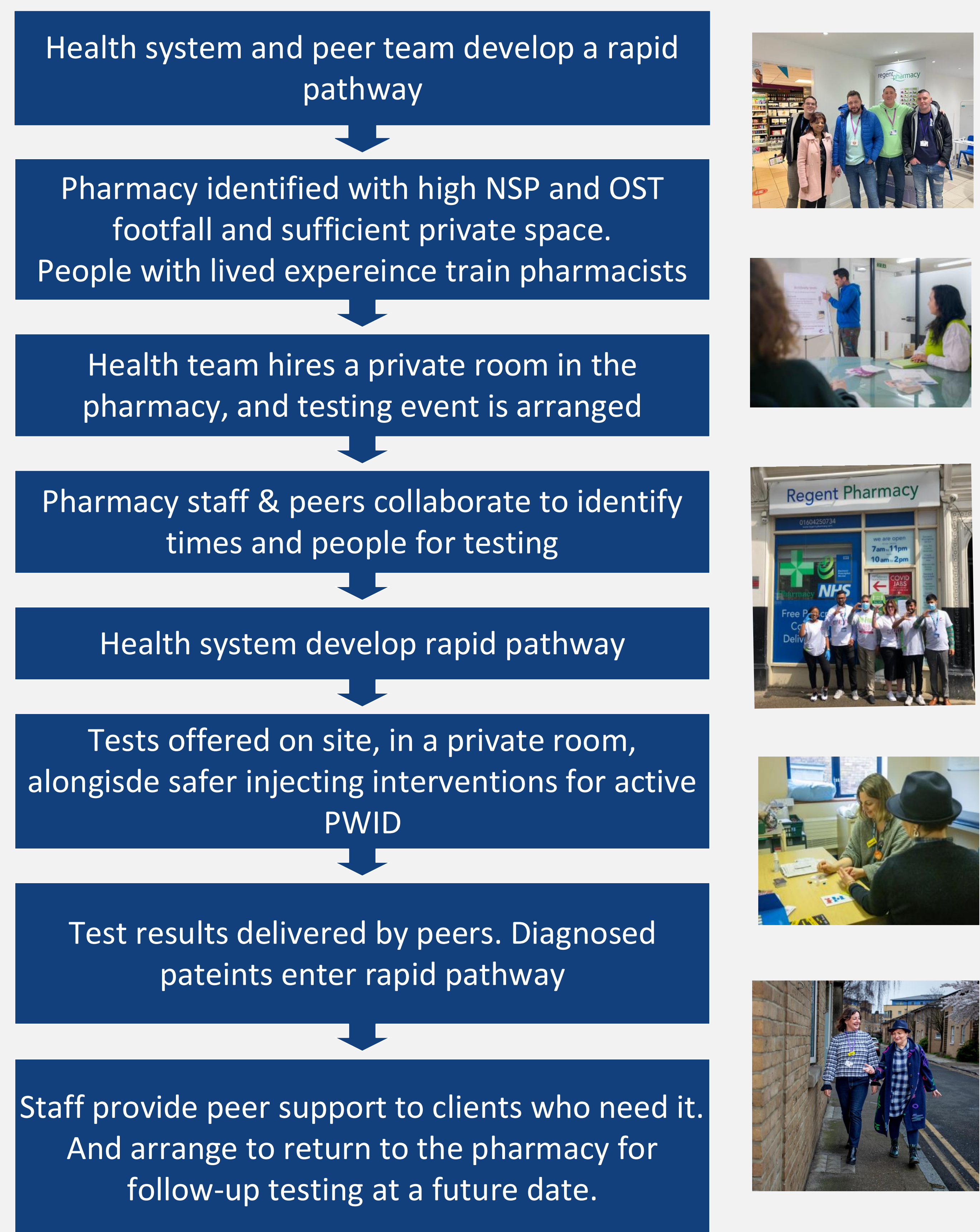
Peer and health services in Leicester, UK worked with a local pharmacy to develop and pilot a new delivery model for pharmacy-based HCV testing.

Intervention

Staff with lived experience of HCV, and significant knowledge and experience delivering testing, trained the pharmacy team in HCV and testing engagement.

They then established a testing service in the pharmacy’s clinical room; all clients visiting the pharmacy for OST and/or NSP were offered testing.

Testing was delivered under two 5 day sessions held 18 months’ apart in September 2021 and February 2023. People accessing the service were asked for feedback, and about what other services they’d like to access.



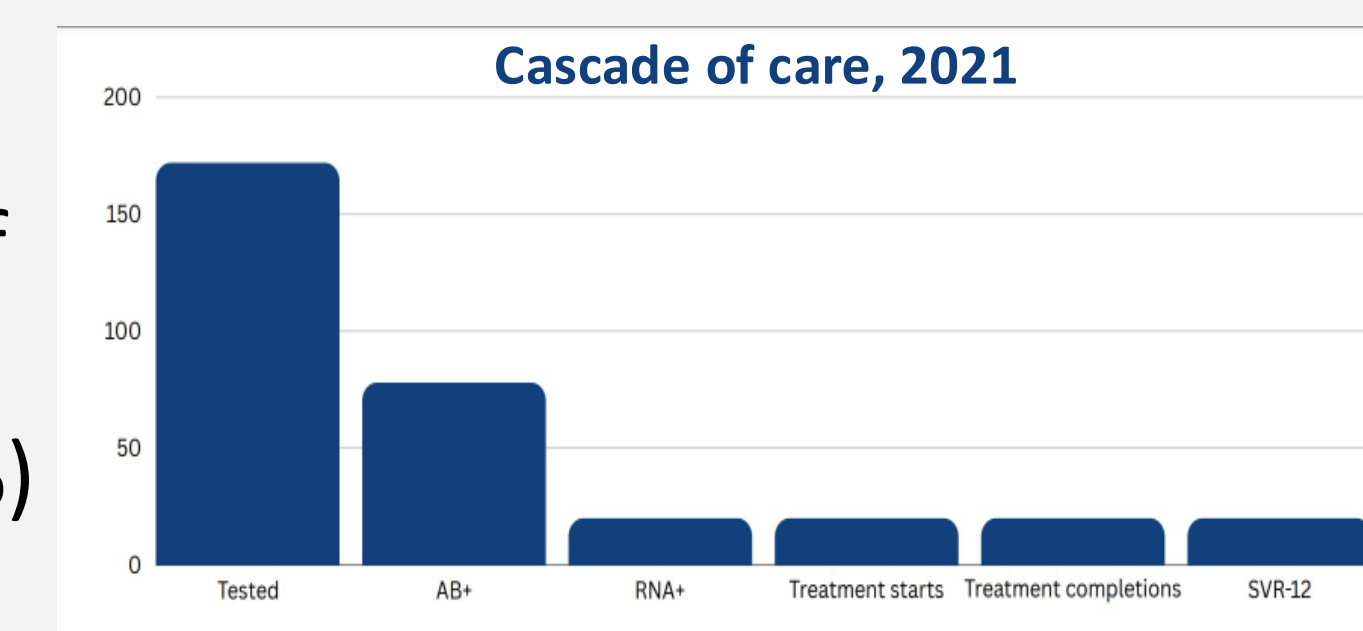
Impact

September 2021: 172 people were tested using a rapid point of care antibody test. 78 tests identified antibodies to HCV (45%) and 20 HCV RNA (26% of AB+). 3 had previously been treated. All 20 people who had HCV successfully completed treatment.

February 2023: 102 people were tested of whom 35 had HCV antibodies (34%). 34/35 RNA tests were negative (97%). One person was RNA positive and was known to services.

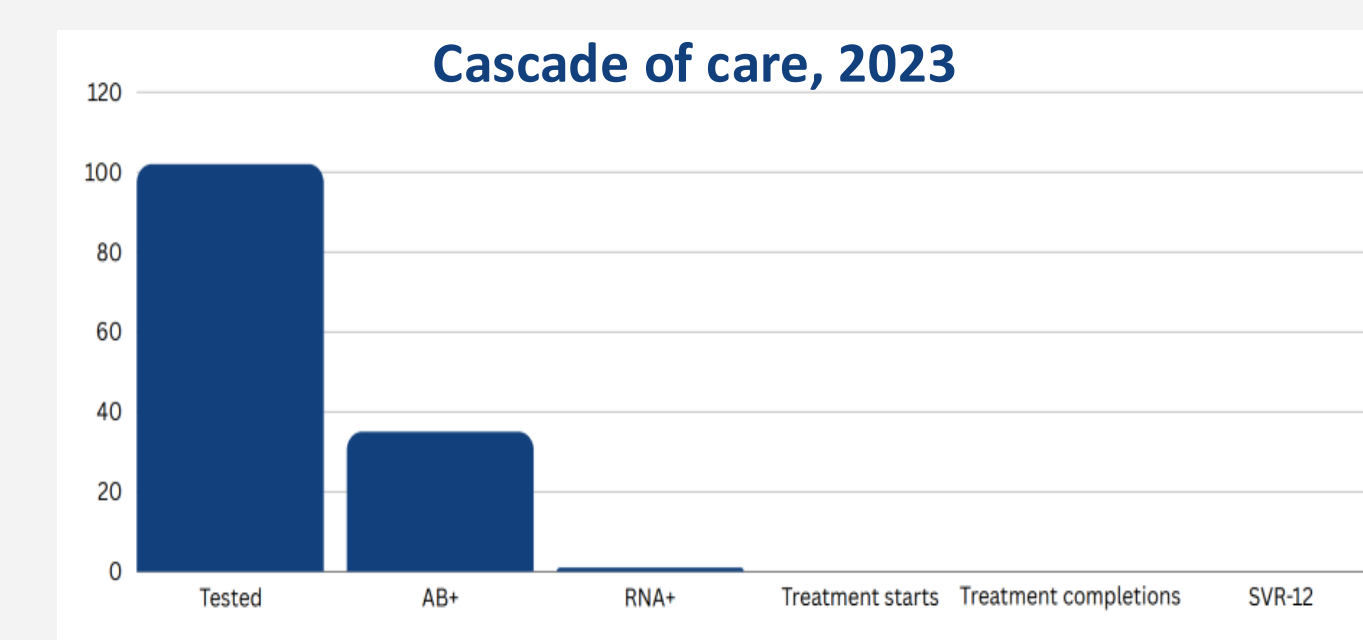
33 people were tested in both 2021 and 2023, 9 of whom (27%) reported current injecting and 13 (39%) previous injecting.

No reinfections were identified among these patients diagnosed in 2021.

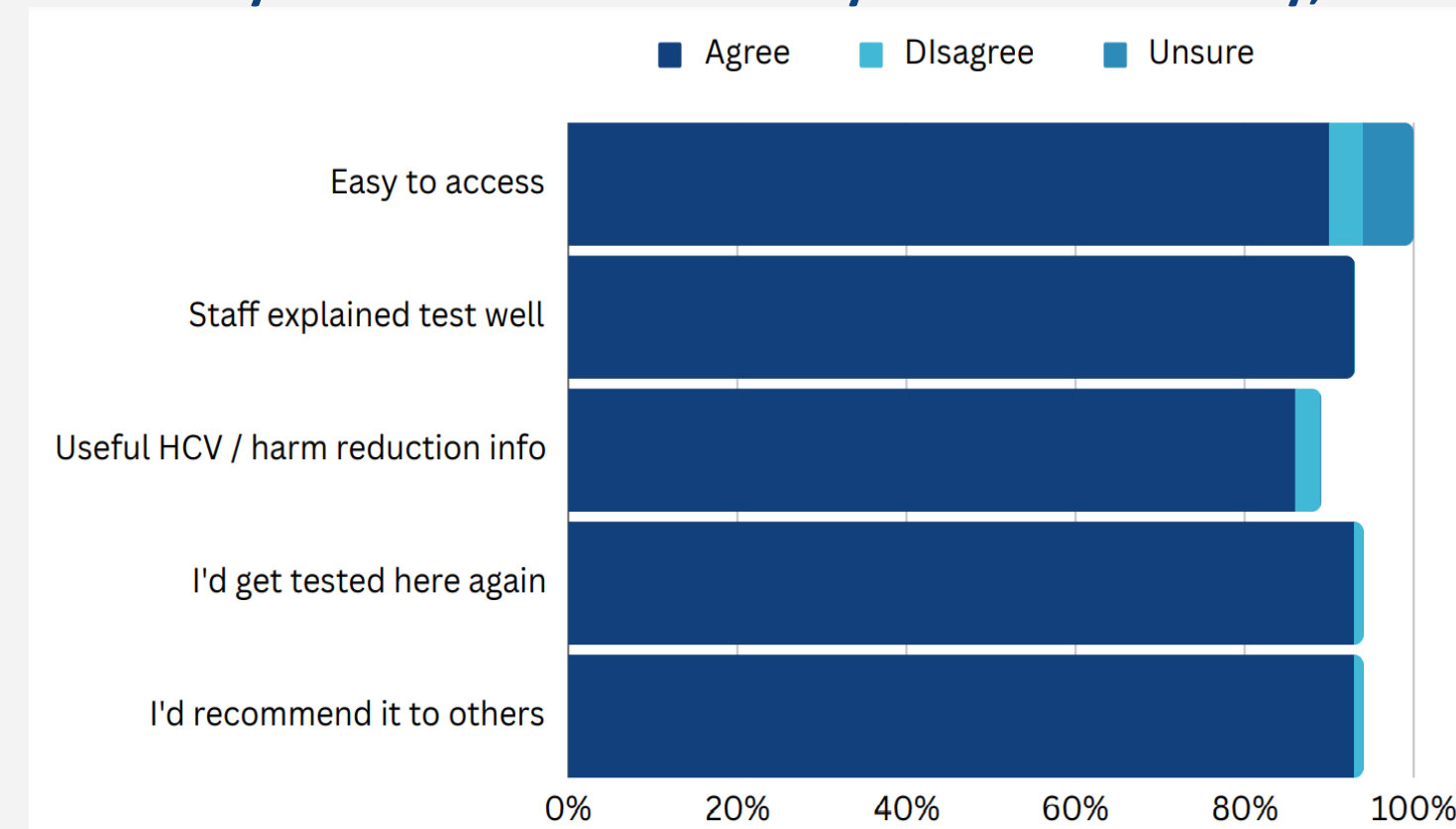


2021: 172 tests
20 RNA+ (12%)

2023: 104 tests
1 (known) RNA+ (3%),
No reinfections among 33 people tested at both visits

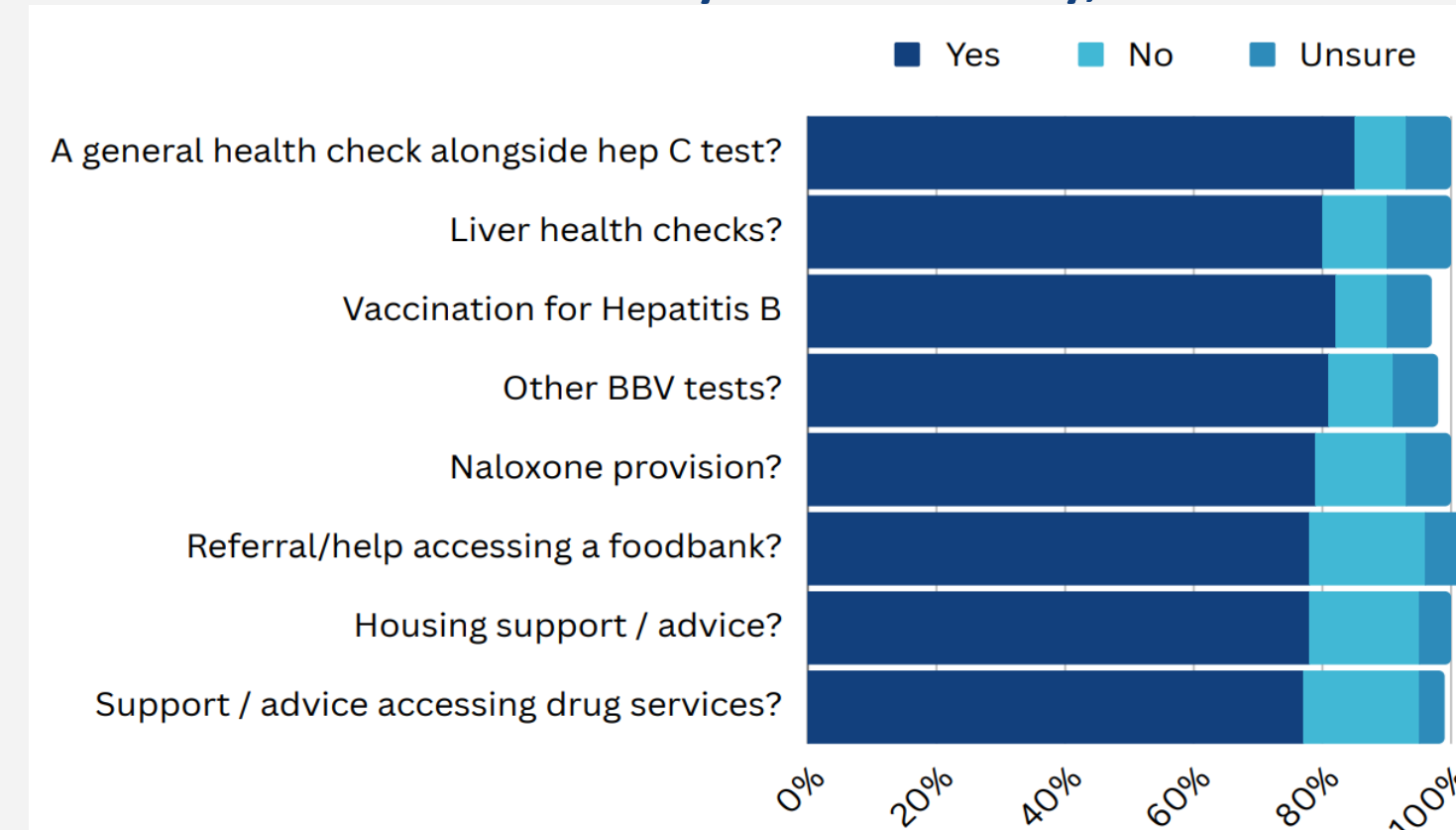


How did you find the service today? Feedback survey, n=72



People tested were very positive about the service. 93% of respondents said they’d be tested at the pharmacy again and 93% would recommend it to others.

What other services would you like? Survey, n=72



There was also widespread appetite for additional testing to be available in the pharmacy, with 85% of respondents stating that they’d like a general health check alongside their hepatitis C test.

Conclusions & Next steps

Pharmacy testing has worked well as a short-term, in-reach intervention in this setting.

Peer-led testing was popular, and progress to treatment was excellent.

Although most people tested were at ongoing risk, they did not contract HCV again over 18 months. This may be driven by lower prevalence of HCV as well as harm reduction and prevention provided with treatment.

As well as scaling this project to include a more comprehensive screening and healthcare offer, we will conduct qualitative work to explore this lack of reinfection.