

Collaborative Working Outcomes Summary

Project Title:	STEP-C Free: Support to Treatment by Engagement with Peers – Hep C Free
Parties to the Collaborative Working:	Gilead Sciences Ltd; NHS Forth Valley Sexual Health and Blood Borne Virus Managed Care Network
Start Date:	07/2023
Completion Date:	08/2024

Outcomes Summary:

The STEP-C Free project successfully demonstrated that a peer-supported, point-of-care testing and treatment model delivered in community settings can significantly improve identification, engagement, and treatment of individuals with Hepatitis C (HCV), particularly among underserved and hard-to-reach populations. Over a 13-month period, 406 individuals were engaged, with 44 confirmed HCV RNA positive (10.8%), and 84% of those initiating treatment successfully completing therapy, supported by peer-led interventions. The use of rapid point-of-care testing reduced time to treatment from c.10 weeks to within days, minimising loss to follow-up and improving retention. Delivery within non-traditional settings (e.g. homeless shelters, recovery services), combined with peer support, enabled access to populations not reached through conventional pathways, supporting a treatment-as-prevention approach and contributing to local HCV micro-elimination goals. The project provides a replicable, scalable model of care that integrates testing, treatment, and holistic support, demonstrating clear benefit to patients, the NHS, and wider public health outcomes.

Project Learnings:	-Peer-led engagement is critical to successfully reaching and retaining underserved populations, improving trust, uptake, and adherence. -Point-of-care testing significantly reduces time to treatment, minimising disengagement associated with traditional testing pathways. -Community-based delivery models (e.g. foodbanks, recovery services, shelters) are more effective than traditional settings for engaging high-risk groups -A holistic, whole-person approach (addressing social and practical barriers) is essential to enable successful treatment outcomes -Consistency of location and strong community relationships improves engagement and attendance over time -Cross-sector collaboration (NHS, third sector, community organisations) is key to effective implementation and reach -The model is scalable and transferable to other geographies and disease areas to support elimination strategies
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Publications: n/a

Contributions of Each Party:

Gilead Sciences Ltd - Gilead provided a combination of strategic expertise, project management support, and financial contribution to enable delivery of the STEP-C Free initiative. This included approximately 270 hours of project team input across Market Access, Patient Access to Care, and Medical functions, focused on: Project governance, coordination, and stakeholder engagement. Delivery of pathway mapping workshops and ongoing optimisation support. Sharing best practice and insights from UK and international HCV elimination programmes. Supporting cross-sector collaboration and connectivity with NHS and third-sector partners. Providing non-promotional expertise at workshops and training sessions. In addition, Gilead provided financial support (£47,985) to NHS Forth Valley for the procurement of the Cepheid GeneXpert testing platform and associated consumables, alongside an estimated £27,187.50 in staff time contribution, enabling implementation of rapid point-of-care testing. NHS Forth Valley BBV Managed Care Network NHS Forth Valley led the design, implementation, and delivery of the service model, contributing approximately 1,300 hours of staff time across clinical, public health, and operational roles to an estimated value of £90,684.76. NHS Forth Valley also contributed £15,000 in travel expenses for project staff, radio promotional campaign and sundries (printed material, pens etc). Key responsibilities included: Overall project management and operational delivery. Procurement, deployment, and governance of the Cepheid testing platform. Recruitment, training, and supervision of peer support workers (in partnership with the Hepatitis C Trust). Delivery of community-based testing, treatment, and patient support. Stakeholder engagement across NHS, local authority, and third-sector organisations. Data collection, monitoring, evaluation, and outcomes reporting. NHS Forth Valley also retained ownership of project data and responsibility for ongoing sustainability planning, including development of the model beyond the joint working period. Total contributions: Gilead sciences £75,145.50, NHS Forth Valley BBV MCN: £105,684.76