

Background

- 146,500 people are infected with hepatitis C (Hep C) in New York City (NYC).
- Forty percent are unaware of their infection and only 14 percent have been cured.
- Sharing drug use equipment is the leading risk factor for Hep C infection.
- Treating and curing Hep C reduces the risk of liver disease, cancer and premature death, and prevents transmission of the virus.
- People with Hep C face strong barriers to accessing Hep C care and treatment. Barriers include drug use, homelessness, mental health issues and insurance restrictions on medication coverage.
- Peer navigation helps hard-to-reach people at risk for or living with Hep C overcome barriers to care and treatment, and prevent (re)infection.

Program Description

The goal of the NYC Hep C Peer Navigation Program is to prevent new Hep C infections and navigate people at risk for Hep C through testing and medical care. The program is administered by the New York City Health Department and training and technical assistance is provided by the Harm Reduction Coalition.

In Fiscal Year 2017, New York City Council allocated \$337,504* to fund peer navigators at 15 Injection Drug User Health Alliance syringe exchange programs to provide:

- Outreach to people at risk for Hep C
- Hep C health coaching and prevention services
- Referrals to supportive services
- Navigation through complete Hep C testing
- Linkage to and retention in Hep C medical care

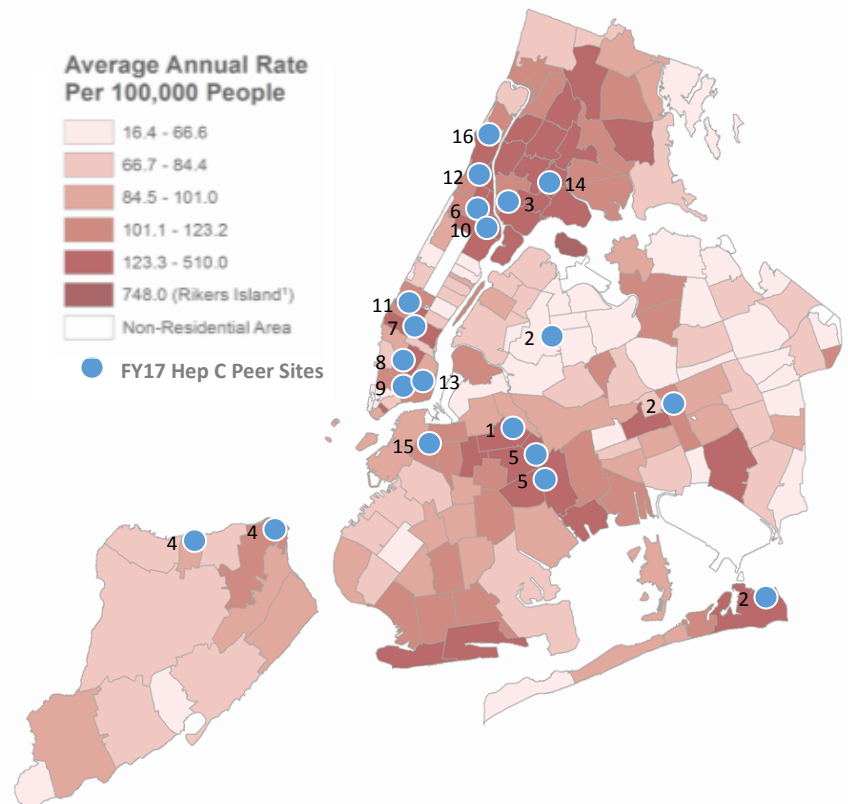
**Including funding for training and technical assistance by Harm Reduction Coalition*

Hep C in New York City and NYC Hep C Peer Program Sites

The following map shows the rate of newly reported Hep C in 2016 by ZIP code and the location of NYC Hep C Peer Navigation.

Program Sites:

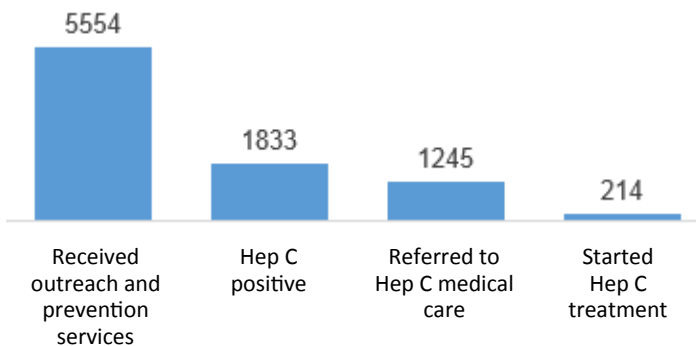
1. After Hours Project
2. AIDS Center of Queens County
3. BOOM!Health
4. Community Health Action of Staten Island
5. Family Services Network of New York
6. Harlem United FROST'D
7. Harm Reduction Coalition
8. Housing Works Crosby Street
9. Lower East Side Harm Reduction Center
10. New York Harm Reduction Educators
11. Positive Health Project
12. Praxis Housing Initiatives, Inc.
13. Safe Horizon Streetwork LES Project
14. St. Ann's Corner of Harm Reduction
15. VOCAL-NY
16. Washington Heights CORNER Project



Program Outcomes

From July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2017:

- 5,554** people living with or at risk for Hep C were enrolled and received Hep C health coaching and prevention services.
- 2,878** Hep C tests were completed.
- 1,833** patients reported Hep C infection or had a positive Hep C test result.
- 1,245** patients were referred to Hep C medical care
- 214** started Hep C treatment.



Findings

- Peer navigators continue to reach thousands of New Yorkers at risk or living with Hep C each year.
- People facing homelessness or unstable housing require more resources and time from the peer navigators to engage into Hep C care.
- Establishing strong linkage agreements with Hep C medical care programs and providers was a lengthy process and was essential for 10 sites where care was not available onsite.
- Full time peer navigation at each agency is needed to follow up with patients in need of Hep C services, support and accompaniment.
- Contractual gaps in services every year make it difficult to build trust with patients and support linkage to and retention in care overtime.

Patient Characteristics

All patients had a history of drug use; most patients were active users.

38% were Black and **41%** Latino.

42% did not know their Hep C status at intake.

35% were 51-70 years old; **16%** were 29 years or younger.

4.5% were transgender.

Peer navigators reported the following barriers to Hep C care or treatment:

- Homelessness or unstable housing
- Provider stigma against people who use drugs
- Lack of insurance coverage or insurance restrictions on medication coverage due to active drug use
- Unmanaged drug use, alcohol use, or mental health issue

A true lesson from this program is accepting people where they are. If you are homeless, Hep C can be the least of your priorities at that moment. I had to rethink how I approached people to make sure Hep C is addressed.

– NYC Hep C peer navigator

When this program began in 2014, another navigator started out with this gentleman in the SRO. He was resistant to everything and he was still smoking crack. I took over the site and picked up where the navigator left off with this individual. Today he is in HIV care, cleared of Hep C and has his own apartment (because he's been living in SROs ever since he's been ill). He has a job and is going back to school.

– NYC Hep C peer navigator