

Hepatitis C Testing During a Global Pandemic: San Francisco's Lessons Learned

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BACKGROUND

- Almost 12,000 people are living with hepatitis C virus (HCV) in San Francisco, which is approximately 1.3% of all San Franciscans.
- While about 2.8% of people living in San Francisco are people who inject drugs (PWID), an estimated 90.4% of untreated, active HCV infections in 2019 were among PWID.
- On March 17, 2020, San Francisco's health officer issued a "shelter in place" order in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, effectively halting almost all HCV outreach and testing efforts in the city.
- Members of *End Hep C SF*—San Francisco's HCV elimination initiative, a multi-sector independent consortium comprised of more than 38 organizations—continued to meet virtually, and used regular meetings to find creative ways to safely resume antibody testing services after an initial drop-off in care.

METHODS

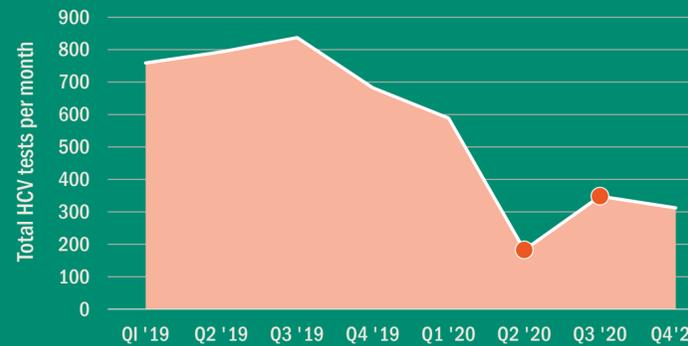
- The members of *End Hep C SF* worked together to develop creative strategies to continue addressing HCV during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Some strategies still in use during the ongoing COVID-19 threat include:

<p>1) Maintaining low-barrier HCV treatment access through telehealth and mobile services</p> 	<p>2) Leveraging research studies that provided HCV testing and treatment</p> 	<p>3) Offering HCV screening and linkage to care in tandem with COVID-19-related initiatives</p> 
<p>4) Being inventive, such as administering HCV treatment in shelter-in-place hotels</p> 	<p>5) Establishing a data dashboard to track HCV testing and treatment in San Francisco</p> 	<p>6) Relying on partnerships and collaboration to solve problems and avoid burnout</p> 

KEY MESSAGES

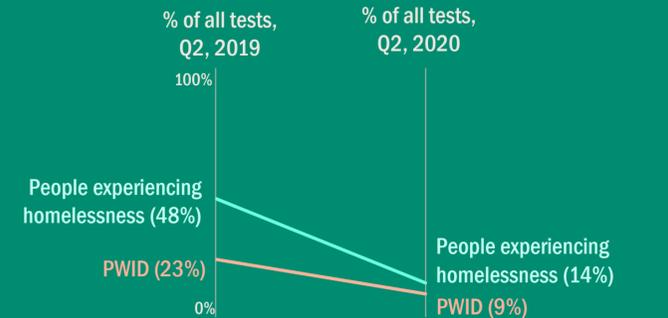
- 1 At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, community-based HCV rapid antibody testing decreased. However, innovative strategies employed during the pandemic supported the rebound of testing in quarters 3 and 4 of 2020.

Figure A. Number of community-based HCV tests per month (quarterly avg.)



- 2 Decreased testing was more pronounced among people experiencing homelessness and PWID, highlighting the need for equitable responses.

Figure B. % of all community-based HCV tests that were among people who are homeless and people who inject drugs in Q2 of 2019 and Q2 of 2020



- 3 Lessons learned will inform community-based HCV testing in the ongoing pandemic context.

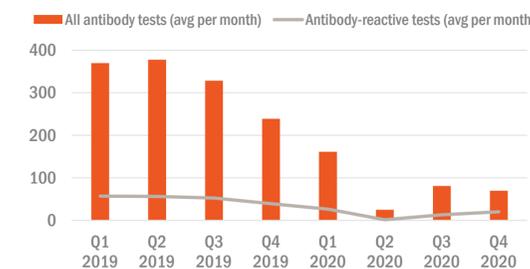
RESULTS

During the COVID-19 pandemic, community-based testing by member agencies of *End Hep C SF* decreased from an average of 793 rapid antibody tests per month to only 183 tests per month between quarter 2 of 2019 and quarter 2, 2020 (see Figure C, orange bars).

The pandemic also impacted the number of tests conducted among people experiencing homelessness and PWID (see Figures D, E).

- In Q2 of 2019, 23.2% of total tests were among PWID; in Q2 of 2020 only 9.3% of total tests were among PWID.
- In Q2 of 2019, 47.6% of total tests were among people experiencing homelessness; in Q2 of 2020 only 13.7% of total tests were among people experiencing homelessness.

Figure D. Total community-based HCV tests per month (orange) and total antibody reactive tests per month (grey), quarterly average among people experiencing homelessness



However, as shown in all figures, by late 2020, testing numbers were starting to rebound, including among PWID and people who were unhoused.

CONCLUSIONS

- Our data indicate that those who were able to access HCV antibody testing during the early pandemic response in San Francisco tended to be those more typically well-served by social systems.
- However, *End Hep C SF* members were resilient, passionate, and creative about helping people living with or at risk for HCV infection during the pandemic, and a variety of innovative strategies allowed sustained progress toward HCV elimination.

Figure C. Total community-based HCV antibody tests per month (orange) and total of antibody reactive tests per month (grey), quarterly avg.

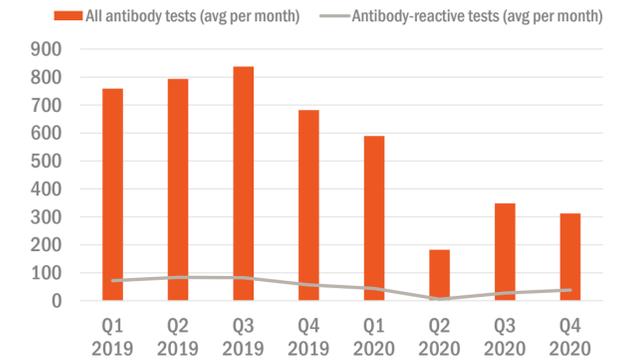


Figure E. Total community-based HCV tests per month (orange) and total antibody reactive tests per month (grey), quarterly average among people who inject drugs (PWID)

