

ENGAGING AFFECTED COMMUNITIES IN TREATMENT ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNING

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Background: The absence of a cohesive community of people affected by hepatitis C and the reluctance of people to engage with issues associated with injecting drug use are key challenges in advocating for new treatments. This paper sets out to prove that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; if they have access to the means.

Methods: This paper describes the work to engage the affected community in campaigning for access to Direct Acting Antiviral hep C treatment in Australia through the Equal Treatment Access campaign. The campaign reached out to communities including current and former injecting drug users (IDU), prisoners, as well as people with hep C living in rural and remote regions, providing them with an opportunity engage with the issues as well as helping expedite the approval of new treatments for hepatitis C.

Results: Engaging members of the affected community in advocacy campaigning was both useful in achieving the objectives of the campaign and helpful in enabling members of affected communities understand that they can influence the agenda on issues which directly affect them. The campaign helped ensure Australia was one of the first countries in the world to publicly subsidise the drugs for their entire population, no matter what a patient's condition is or how they contracted the disease.

Conclusion: Providing low involvement tools like online petitions and profoma templates provides a means for members of hard to reach communities to engage in advocacy campaigning. It is argued that such engagement may lead greater engagement with their health in general and with the arrival of new treatments, a greater propensity to undertake treatment for hepatitis C.

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