

Working with the:



HEP C U Later

Hep C U Later Pilot Report:
Recovery Project – Social Media
Outreach Pilot

This pilot tested a targeted social media-based awareness and engagement approach aimed at reaching people who have previously used drugs but are no longer engaged with drug treatment services. Using a co-produced toolkit and a network of trusted ‘messengers’, the pilot sought to increase awareness of hepatitis C, promote free NHS testing, and signpost individuals to support and treatment.

Introduction to the Pilot Report:

Hep C U Later is an NHS England-commissioned programme (2024–2027) focused on eliminating hepatitis C through innovative approaches that extend beyond community drug and alcohol services.

Evidence suggests that people who used drugs in the past but are no longer in contact with community drug and alcohol treatment services may be unaware of the risks of hepatitis C, testing options, the availability of curative treatment, or that they may have come into contact with the virus. Routine testing for blood-borne viruses did not start universally until 2010, so anyone who left treatment services before this time may not have been tested.

The Recovery Social Media Pilot was developed to explore whether targeted digital communications, shared via personal networks, could reach this population and encourage engagement with testing and support.

Pilot Outline

Aim:

To test whether a targeted social media communications through individual social networks approach can increase hepatitis C awareness and testing uptake among individuals with a history of drug use who are not currently engaged with community drug and alcohol treatment services.

Objectives:

- To reach individuals who may be at risk of hepatitis C but are not currently in contact with community drug and alcohol treatment services
- To increase awareness of hepatitis C transmission, health impacts, and the availability of curative treatment
- To promote uptake of the free NHS at-home hepatitis C testing kit using a dedicated link to track test orders
- To assess the feasibility of using ‘messengers’ to amplify public health messages via personal social media networks

Pilot Outline

Target Audience:

- People who have historically used illicit substances and are no longer engaged with community drug and alcohol treatment services, or who may never have been known to a service.
- Individuals who may identify as being in recovery from drug addiction, recognising this term is subjective, or those who do not use recovery-based language.
- People who have made changes to their drug use and are no longer at risk of contracting hepatitis C.
- Using the opportunity to reach people who currently use substances and are not yet engaged with drug treatment services.
- People who may have previously been treated for hepatitis C who did not get post-treatment blood tests carried out.
- 'Messengers': individuals with personal social media networks that include the target audience.

Implementation

The concept was simple; however, because the initial people starting the 'comms chain' had dual roles as both messengers and professionals employed by the NHS (Louise and Tony), governance and safety needed to be considered.

Both Louise and Tony identify as being in 12-step abstinent recovery and are both employed by Hep C U Later (Inclusion, Midlands Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust).

To ensure that online safety was being managed carefully, Hep C U Later developed a social media toolkit for the campaign, which could be shared with messengers.



Pilot Design

The pilot used a social media toolkit comprising pre-approved messages, graphics, and safety guidance. Content was designed to be shared flexibly by the messengers across platforms such as Facebook, X, LinkedIn, and others.

Messages focused on:

- Hepatitis C awareness and transmission
- The risk associated with past injecting or snorting drug use
- The absence of symptoms in many cases
- Free, confidential NHS testing
- Availability of a simple tablet-based cure

All posts signposted individuals to the NHS hepatitis C testing portal with a dedicated referral link, and the Hepatitis C Trust for additional support.

Louise and Tony started the 'comms chain' with posts on their personal social media accounts as 'messengers'; however, additional messengers were also sought by Hep C U Later, posting the social media comms pack on their own organisational social media accounts.

The Role of Hep C U Later:

Hep C U Later:

- Developed the messaging and visual content and consulted with NHS England's Viral Hepatitis Elimination Programme Team
- Guided safe and appropriate online engagement within the Social Media Comms Toolkit
- Co-ordinated communications and provided contact points for further information
- Ensured alignment with national hepatitis C elimination priorities
- Louise and Tony were the key 'initial messengers', and opening communications went out across their personal social media accounts and through texts with a direct invitation to take part

We highly recommend you always share this information on your post:

The only way to know if you have hepatitis C is to get a test. Order a free, at home NHS test here: <https://heptest.nhs.uk/ref/recovery>
Below are some examples of information you might also want to share on your post. We also recommend sharing the images each time. You can choose to share one post or all of them.

Key messages:

1. Hepatitis C can cause liver disease, cancer and death.
2. If you've ever injected or snorted drugs you could be living with hepatitis C silently.
3. Infected blood has to enter another person's bloodstream for hepatitis C to be transmitted.
4. There are many ways hepatitis C can be transmitted. For example, sharing equipment used for injecting or snorting drugs, or using unsterile equipment for medical procedures or tattoos.
5. Hepatitis C doesn't always have symptoms.
6. Interferon treatment is not used anymore.
7. Treatment is available and is now a simple course of tablets.
8. You can find out more about hepatitis C at www.HepCULater.com
9. If you would like support around testing, treatment or diagnosis contact The Hepatitis C Trust: call 020 7089 6221, open Monday to Friday, 10.30 am to 4.30 pm, or email helpline@hepctrust.org.uk

Post Graphics (click on the image to download a high resolution copy of the graphics):



Pilot Design

The Role of Preventx

- Created a dedicated link for people to order tests <https://hepctest.nhs.uk/ref/recovery>
- Processed tests in the same way they would do for other people accessing testing
- Provided Hep C U Later with anonymised reports to illustrate take up and results

Governance and Safeguarding

Considerations addressed during implementation included:

- Online safety for messengers (via discussions and agreement with the Head of Communications for Inclusion and HR)
- Alignment with organisational social media and communications policies
- Clear signposting to clinical and support services
- Direction outlining the avoidance of personal health advice being given via social media

Pilot Timelines

The project was due to go live at the start of European Spring Testing Week, 19th – 26th May 2025; however, there were some delays:

- Pilot start: 27th May 2025
- Pilot end: 30th September 2025

Please note the pilot was extended due to issues with Preventx not being able to track requests to the referral link; data was not available for 1st -30th September 2025.

Is there anything else I need to consider when sharing these posts?

Ensuring your online safety is crucial, and our goal is to prevent you from finding yourself in vulnerable situations or feeling unprepared to handle online interactions. To help you navigate this, please refer to the advice and resources provided below:

- You don't need to share personal stories – however, if you do be mindful that you cannot control who can see it.
- Even when posting from your personal accounts you need to ensure it is in line with your organisation's policies and you don't post anything that could negatively impact on your workplace, role or employment.
- Some social media sites let you turn off comments from others if you prefer.
- If you yourself have questions about the online hepatitis C testing portal you can access FAQs on the portal website.
- For questions about this pack, you can email connect.HepCULater@mpft.nhs.uk

If you are contacted with specific questions there are experts in the field available to answer any questions you have – please signpost them to the organisations and information below:

- For anyone who would like to talk about hepatitis C, their test, treatment or diagnosis – Hepatitis C Trust confidential phone number: 020 7089 6221. Website: [The Hepatitis C Trust | Hep C charity](https://www.hepatitisctrust.org.uk/)
- The British Liver Trust has lots of useful information about liver health. Website: [British Liver Trust - Pioneering Liver Health](https://www.britishlivertrust.org.uk/). Helpline: 08006527330 (09:00-15:30 Monday, 09:00-16:00 Tuesday to Friday)
- If you are contacted by any health or social care professionals who would like more information on hepatitis C, they can access resources, training and further contact details by visiting: [About us - HEP C U Later](#)

If you are contacted by someone from outside of the UK please signpost them to the international resources listed below:

- International Network on Health and Hepatitis in Substance Users: <https://inhsu.org/>
- World Hepatitis Alliance: <https://www.worldhepatitisalliance.org/>

Example from the social media comms pack outlining how people can stay safe and keep others safe.

Outcomes

The project ran from 27th May 2025 to 30th September 2025.

Data was received from 26th May 2025 to 31st August 2026, and no data was accessible from 1st September to 30th September 2025.

The referral link could not be tracked at PreventX from 26th May 2025 – 1st July 2026, which means the outcomes cannot be definitively attributed to the pilot. However, during this period it is estimated over 200 people requested a hepatitis C test as a result of the communications both Louise and Tony had with their networks.

Quantitative Outcomes

Number of Social Media Posts Shared from Louise and Tony's Social Media:

- Posts were shared 121 times from Louise's social media accounts
- Posts were shared an additional 34 times from friends accounts (beyond this data is unable to be tracked)
- Posts were shared 15 times from Tony's social media accounts
- There were 6,636 impressions from Louise's LinkedIn account

Louise's accounts were believed to have more individuals in recovery and international networks, while Tony's accounts were thought to have a greater presence in the music industry.

26th May 2025 – 1st July 2025

Due to Preventx being unable to capture which tests were attributed to the pilot, specifically, the following is caveated.

There were 6,161 tests requested via the hepatitis C testing portal during this pilot period, with 3,467 tests being returned and 3,203 successfully tested. Preventx reported an uplift in orders from 26th May to 12th June due to the press release from NHSE and coverage of the Infected Blood Inquiry guidelines for GPs.



Outcomes

There were 1,195 tests ordered during this period from people who had ticked the following risk factors:

- From someone I live(d) with
- Drug paraphernalia like needles, straws or spoons
- Someone with hepatitis C
- Sharing injecting equipment
- Paraphernalia
- Prison

1,075 people ticked more than one of these risk factors. Of these, 607 people sent back their samples for testing.

There were 51 hepatitis C antibody positive results and 7 RNA positive test results, which could potentially be linked to the campaign between 26th May 2025 – 1st July 2026. However, we can only definitely claim one of the RNA positives was linked to the project as we had feedback from this person directly.

1st July – 31st August 2025

56 hepatitis C tests were requested via the NHS testing portal. Of these tests, the following were in the same area as Louise and Tony, respectively, where many of their networks were also based.

- Bournemouth and surrounding area (where Louise is based) 19
- Birmingham (where Tony is based) 7

20 samples were returned. 3 samples could not be tested. Of the remaining 17 samples, 6 were antibody-positive, and no RNA-positive results were found.

The return rate over the entire pilot period was consistent with Preventx's overall reporting (around 50%).

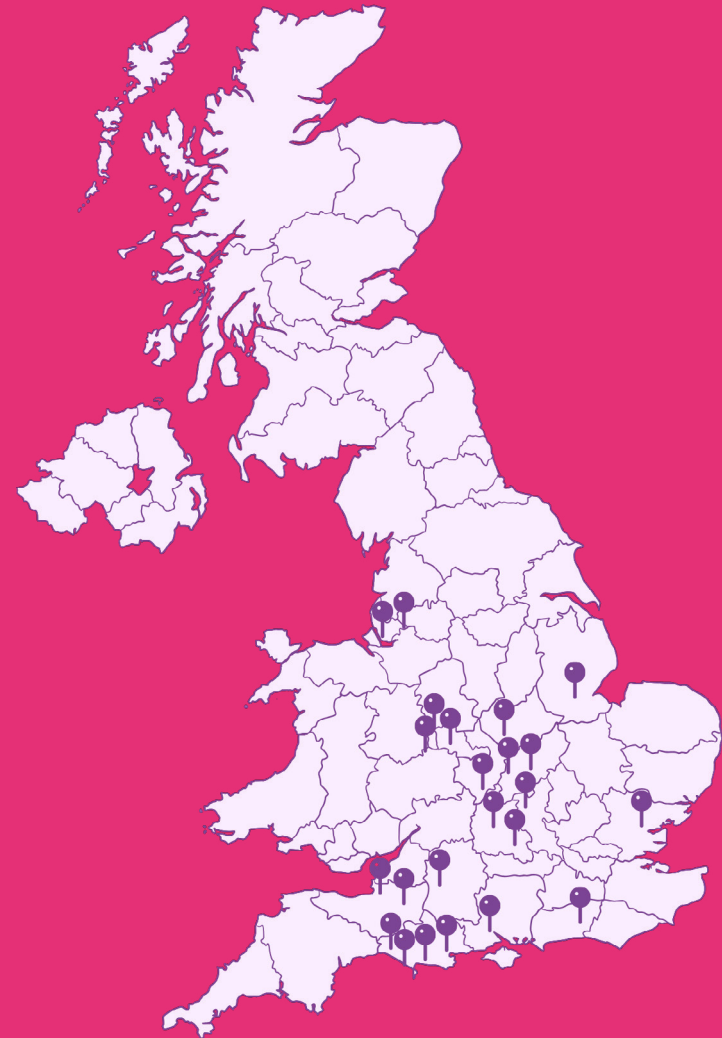
"Thank you so much for encouraging me to get tested, I had no idea I was living with hepatitis C and I may never have known if I had not have seen the Facebook post."

Feedback from a participant of the pilot

Outcomes

The following is a map outlining which locality the other tests were requested from:

- Babergh
- Birmingham
- Blaby
- Bournemouth
- Camden
- Daventry
- Dudley
- Enfield
- Haringey
- Kensington and Chelsea
- Kettering
- Kingston upon Thames
- Liverpool
- Mendip
- Mid Sussex
- Milton Keynes
- North Somerset
- Northampton
- Oxford
- Poole
- Sandwell
- Solihull
- South Holland
- South Northamptonshire
- South Ribble
- Southampton
- Tower Hamlets
- West Dorset
- Westminster
- Weymouth and Portland
- Wiltshire
- Wolverhampton
- Wycombe



Outcomes

Qualitative Feedback

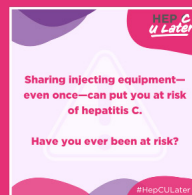
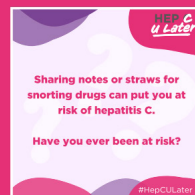
Early feedback indicated:

- Content was clear, accessible, and non-stigmatising
- Messengers valued having approved language and images they felt confident sharing
- Posts prompted conversation about hepatitis C that would not normally take place

Supporting Materials

The pilot produced:

- A reusable social media toolkit
- A set of six approved post messages
- Graphics designed for repeated sharing



"I sent mine off, and the results came back really quick"

Feedback from a participant of the pilot

"I used the NHS Hep C home testing kit and had a great experience. The kit arrived quickly in the mail and had everything needed: a small plastic vial for the blood, three fingerpricks, an alcohol swab, a plaster, and a prepaid return box with a sticker to seal it."

"The test was easy to do. I just pricked my finger and gently massaged the blood into the vial. The instructions were clear and simple to follow."

"Sending it back was a very simple process – I just sealed the box with the plastic seal and posted it. I got my results back really quickly by text."

"It was quick, simple, and stress-free. I'd recommend it to anyone who needs to get a test."

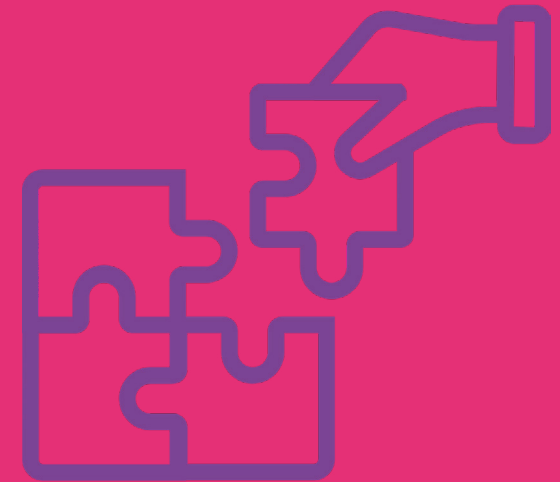
Feedback from a participant of the pilot

Learning

Feedback was received during the pilot from two people who suggested using the word 'recovery', which had been considered during the planning of the pilot and in subsequent communications.

Other key learnings from the pilot included:

- Over-reliance on the referral link for analytics – this could have been avoided if there was enough time before the launch to verify data could be pulled effectively for the link ahead of the project going live.
- The pilot launch overlapped with other campaigns (the Infected Blood Inquiry comms) – this may be better when scheduled in the absence of large comms campaigns.
- Much of the social media analytics that demonstrate impact could not be accessed due to limitations in the project. If the project is expanded, expertise should be sought on how to access this more reliably.
- If the project is expanded, further consideration would need to be given to the language used, as the word 'recovery' can be a barrier for some people engaging with the key messages of getting tested – it is important to ensure that there are enough options within the social media toolkit for people to choose words which are appropriate for them and others to connect with.
- Comms used in this way across personal networks can create an additional workload as people reach out with queries or to say thank you – It is important to ensure enough availability around this time to respond to comments and feedback in real time.



Key Learning Highlights:

Using personal social media networks allows vital hepatitis C messages to reach people we would not otherwise connect with.

- Trusted voices extend reach
- Simple, consistent messaging builds confidence
- Digital outreach complements existing services

What Could Be Improved?

- Earlier engagement of messengers to increase momentum
- Clearer mechanisms for capturing engagement data where possible
- Additional platform specific guidance (e.g. private groups vs public posts)
- Language considerations for each peer group

Conclusion

- Social media can be an effective route to reach people who are no longer engaged with traditional services
- Using trusted messengers increases credibility and reach beyond organisational accounts
- Clear safety guidance is essential to empower messengers while supporting people to manage risk

Scalability Considerations

If rolled out at scale, the following would need consideration:

- Ongoing governance and moderation arrangements
- Expanded messenger networks
- Dedicated evaluation metrics for digital engagement and conversion to testing
- Resource capacity for follow-up support signposting

Next Steps

- Rerun the campaign on a wider scale
- Refine the toolkit based on the pilot learning
- Consider replication in other regions or for other at-risk populations

Appendix

Appendix A: **Recovery Project Social Media Toolkit**



www.hepculater.com



connect.hepculater@mpft.nhs.uk

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