



Studying Benefits of Opt-Out Hepatitis C and HIV Testing

Researchers aim to improve hepatitis C and HIV screening rates among people who inject drugs.

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Aiming to expand access to [hepatitis C](#) (HCV) and [HIV testing](#), researchers at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine (MSM) will use a \$3.3 million grant to study and implement nationwide opt-out testing, according to a [university news release](#).

Opt-out testing, also referred to as universal screening, means people are tested for [HCV](#) and [HIV](#) as a matter of course and without stigma. Although opt-out testing has been shown to improve linkage to care, many syringe service programs (SSPs) lack the funding, training and capacity to offer it, according to researchers.

Following a successful pilot phase across SSPs in [Florida](#), Miller School researchers received a five-year grant from the National Institute on Drug Abuse to expand their ACCESS initiative in hopes of optimizing HCV and HIV screening rates.

Led by Hansel Tookes, MD, MPH, and Tyler Bartholomew, PhD, the ACCESS study will randomly implement opt-out testing or standard testing across 32 SSPs.

More than 2 million people in the United States have [HCV](#). Guidelines recommend that all adults should be screened for HCV at least once, regardless of risk factors.

What's more, approximately 1.2 million people in the United States have HIV, about 13% of whom don't know it, [according to HIV.gov](#).

People who inject drugs are at an increased risk for HIV, HCV, hepatitis B and more. About 11 million people inject drugs globally, according to the [World Health Organization](#).

Tookes, an associate professor of clinical medicine in the Division of Infectious Diseases at the Miller School and medical director of the [IDEA Exchange](#), said it is “critical to increase the reach to this community.”

“We encounter a lot of people who are in need of compassionate and culturally competent care,” he added.

Based on the success of the pilot study, researchers anticipate that the opt-out method will increase testing rates beyond the national average of 15%, according to the Miller School.

Additionally, a \$2 million Front Lines of Communities in the United States (FOCUS) award from Gilead Sciences will support opt-out screening and linkage to care across SSPs.

“The partnership between Gilead’s FOCUS program and the IDEA Exchange is an amazing demonstration of public-private partnership,” Derek Spencer, FOCUS executive director, told the Miller School. “These are needed collaborations where people are coming together with innovation to solve problems. These public-private partnerships are needed to help end the epidemics of HIV and hepatitis C for everyone, everywhere.”

To read more, click [#Hepatitis C Testing](#) or [#HIV Testing](#). There, you’ll find headlines such as “[Proposed 5-Year Program Aims to Put Country on the Path to Eliminating Hepatitis C](#),” “[HIV, HBV, HCV Testing Increased Among Medicaid Enrollees](#)” and “[Why the U.S. Is Falling Behind Other Countries in Hepatitis C Treatment](#).”