

# The story of collaboration – Reducing the burden of hepatitis C in Calhoun County, Michigan



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The Calhoun County Public Health Department (MI) created a referral system to streamline the process of a hepatitis C case from probable diagnosis to treatment. The system links cases with treatment and a harm-reduction program, and has contributed to decreased incidence, and more people being cured of hepatitis C in the county.

## The “What”

Hepatitis C rates in Calhoun County (MI) have historically been higher than other counties in the state. To address this issue, the communicable disease team at the Calhoun County Public Health Department (CCPHD) works educate the public, reduce transmission, and decrease case numbers through treatment. CCPHD created a system to streamline the process of a case from probable diagnosis to treatment. Communicable disease staff, who receive funding through the Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity for the Prevention and Control of Emerging Infectious Diseases (ELC) cooperative agreement, make contact with all probable and confirmed cases. During the interview, they are able to offer linkage of care to a provider within CCPHD for treatment and to a harm-reduction program, Project Access, if necessary. Communicable disease staff are able to schedule these referrals while on the phone with cases allowing them to enter treatment faster. CCPHD selected this approach because data showed that people were slipping through the cracks when being to referred to outside partners.


## The “So What”

Over the last 5 years, hepatitis C cases in Calhoun County have been **steadily decreasing**. The collaboration between CCPHD’s communicable disease staff and clinic have provided the opportunity for **19 people to be cured of hepatitis C** since offering treatment in October 2021. Since January 2023 (6 months), the clinic has cured 9 people, which is equal to what they did in all of 2022.

## The “Now What”

Project Access is trying to expand into other areas of Calhoun County. Hopefully with their expansion, there will be more referrals to the Hepatitis C program. CCPHD is also building upon a project that was initiated in the Calhoun County Jail to offer treatment to inmates. CCPHD will continue to grow and improve the hepatitis C program until case rates drop to a level where the program is no longer needed.

Key contributors to this project include Kristie Baker, RN, Communicable Disease Public Health Nurse; Michelle Thorne, Nurse Practitioner; Jackson Bensley, MPH, Project Access Health Educator.

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