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SWISS HEPATITIS

**What is hepatitis
exactly?**

**Annual Report
2023**

FOREWORD

Almost there?



For the first time, the fight against viral hepatitis in Switzerland is significantly reflected in a national program. With the policy document "Stop HIV, hepatitis B virus, hepatitis C virus and sexually transmitted infections NAPS" adopted by the Federal Council at the end of 2023, we have reached a key milestone that Swiss Hepatitis has been working towards for years. On behalf of the entire Board of Swiss Hepatitis, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to all network members and other contributors and supporters. In addition to the importance of achieving the elimination targets, the integration of hepatitis in the NAPS is an excellent example of how civil society in our country can play a relevant role in political processes.

Including viral hepatitis B and C in the NAPS is an important milestone

but not the goal. To ensure that new infections and the consequences of these chronic infectious diseases can be brought to zero, as the World Health Organisation (WHO) has formulated as a global goal, adequate measures are now needed, and funds must be allocated accordingly. Swiss Hepatitis has been invited by the Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) to contribute to the planning and implementation of the necessary measures. We will continue to develop successful ongoing projects. And we will launch new projects where necessary – whenever possible – in the sense of an integrated approach with other players.

In short, we have achieved a lot, but there is still much to do. We can build on our successful work to date and will continue to pursue our goals with great energy.

**Prof. Dr. med. Philip Bruggmann,
President Swiss Hepatitis**

POLICY

A milestone has been reached

We have been campaigning for many years for viral hepatitis to be included in the national HIV program. The roadmap "Elimination of Hepatitis and HIV in Switzerland" by the Federal Commission for Sexually Transmitted Infections (FCSI) laid the foundation for this.

In the summer of 2020, Parliament adopted a motion by Damian Müller, a member of the Council of States, calling for precisely this. Members of the Swiss Hepatitis Strategy Network, people from our Board of Directors and the staff took part in various workshops to develop the program. We were also actively involved in the consultation process in 2023.

Due to the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic, the development and adoption of the national program was then delayed by two years. We are therefore all the more pleased that the national program "Stop HIV, hepatitis B virus, hepatitis C virus and sexually transmitted infections NAPS" will now come into force on 1 Janu-

ary 2024. This means that the advice former Federal President Ruth Dreifuss gave us when we started almost ten years ago will become a reality: We should work towards integrating measures to eliminate viral hepatitis into the existing structures.

The NAPS has laid the foundation for this. Now, it is a matter of accompanying its implementation. We will continue to work towards our goals with a constructive, critical voice and great energy.

MEETINGS

Swiss Hepatitis Symposium: Let's simplify!

The theme of the Swiss Hepatitis Symposium 2023 was the simplification of care for people with viral hepatitis. As various speakers emphasised, "Simplification" has many faces. However, the elimination of viral hepatitis must succeed.

On a grey November afternoon on Bern's Ziibelemerit, 50 people gathered at Welle7, and another 30

were connected online. **Markus Messerli**, President of the Swiss Pharmaceutical Supply Network, kicked things off. He presented a pilot study with pharmacies in Switzerland that tested customers for hepatitis C. Of 145 patients, 18 had a positive antibody test. The evaluation showed that pharmacies



Panel discussion on "simplification" of viral hepatitis care

are an excellent place to offer tests, especially for high-risk groups.

John Dillon, Professor at the University of Dundee, joined online from Scotland and presented the successful microelimination of hepatitis C in the Tayside region of Scotland. Pharmacies played a crucial role in this. Their studies showed that the care of patients with chronic hepatitis C was significantly better in pharmacies than through other treatment routes.

Niklas Luhmann from the World Health Organization (WHO) shows that only a small proportion of infected people worldwide are diagnosed with hepatitis B or C, with the figures varying wildly from region to region. International guidelines are moving in the direction of simplifying diagnosis and treatment. The recommendations today focus on decentralisation, integration and task sharing. In particular, this means that the care of those affected shifts from specialised clinics to primary care, which looks after those at risk.

Margaret Hellard, infectious disease specialist from Melbourne, spoke about simplifying hepatitis B care. Hellard made the case that all patients with chronic hepatitis B

should be treated. Although there is no conclusive scientific evidence, there are indications that this is the right approach. The risk of a person living with hepatitis B developing liver cancer is comparable to the risk of a person smoking a pack of cigarettes a day. We should consider chronic viral hepatitis as a cancer-causing infectious disease.

A conversation with a **patient living with hepatitis B** confirmed this view. He had been infected with hepatitis B at birth by his mother. At a further examination in adulthood, he had already developed liver cancer – without ever having had any symptoms. The doctor gave him only a short time to live. It was a shock for the father, whose wife was pregnant with their second child at the time of the diagnosis. This was followed by operations, months of hospitalisation and finally, a liver transplant. With a lot of luck, the patient survived the cancer. Today, he and his family are doing well.

Andrea Bregenzer and **Claude Scheidegger** presented examples of how care can be provided in opioid agonist therapy (OAT) programs and prisons in Switzerland. Andrea Bregenzer showed that point-of-care tests are possible in pharmacies.

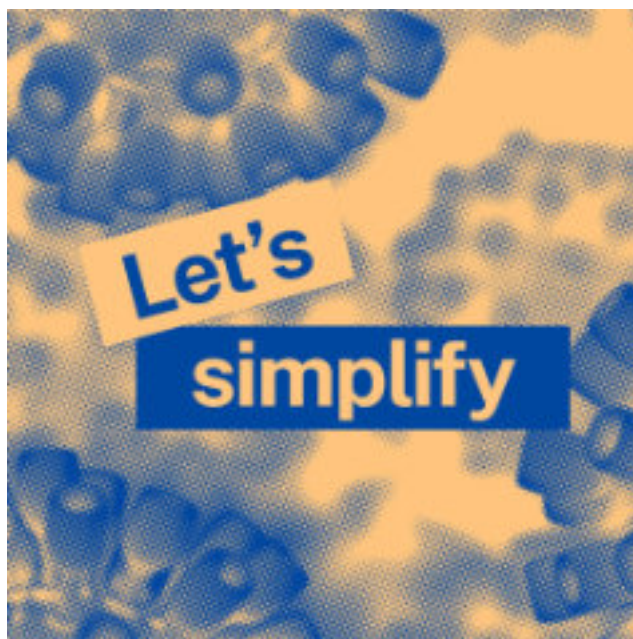
Many problems have already been solved, and diagnostics and access to treatment have already been simplified. Nevertheless, there are still a variety of obstacles, such as the need for reimbursement for rapid tests. Claude Scheidegger, head of the Swiss HepFree in Prisons (SHiPP) programme, presented initial results from Swiss prisons. While individual infections with hepatitis B and HIV were detected, the prevalence of chronic hepatitis C is between one and three per cent. These are preliminary figures in a program that is only just gaining momentum.

Patrizia Künzler-Heule, a nursing scientist at St. Gallen Cantonal Hospital, showed how interprofessional collaboration can simplify nursing care. In so-called "nurse-led" care, a nurse accompanies the patient through all phases of treatment and works closely with hepatologists, primary care providers, or Spitex services.

The event concluded with a panel discussion in which the participants discussed the importance of pharmacies in the healthcare system and overcoming barriers to care.

Network meetings

As in previous years, the members of the Swiss Hepatitis Strategy Network met twice in 2023 for the 20th and 21st network meetings since the launch of the Swiss Hepatitis Strategy. At the meeting, the members drew up the 5th update of the Swiss Hepatitis Strategy 2014-2030, which was adopted by the network members in November 2023.



The theme of this year's Symposium

COMMUNICATION

New campaign

After four years of a successful campaign with the theme "Hepatitis C is deadly, but curable", we have decided to realign our information and awareness-raising campaign. We are now focusing on a "content campaign" on various social media channels. Regular and content-rich posts about viral hepatitis on Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn will

draw attention to the topic of hepatitis. We aim to be present online with our messages all year round.

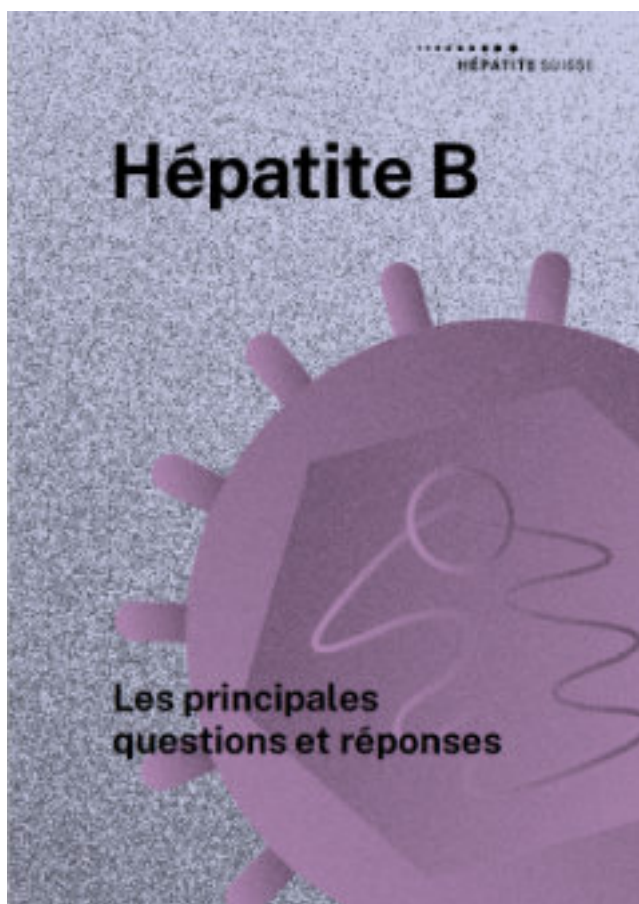
We started this after the summer vacation. The first evaluation shows a positive picture. All campaigns achieved around 750,000 impressions between July and December 2023, reaching almost 500,000 people. Postings were clicked on 2,166 times. The videos were



Sensibilisation of the Italian community on hepatitis C

viewed nearly 15,000 times, with over 1,000 reactions (likes, emojis, comments). At the same time, we also recorded an increase in messages from people with questions about infection risks, testing, and treatment options.

At the same time, we are also working on making our websites more accessible to find via Google searches. To this end, we added a "Frequently Asked Questions" page to hepatitis-schweiz.ch.



Our detailed hepatitis B brochure has been ordered frequently

Brochures

The completely revised brochure "Hepatitis B – the Most Important Questions and Answers" was finalised and printed at the beginning of 2023. It is now available in the Swiss AIDS Federation online store in German, French and Italian. The text was redrafted entirely and written in easier-to-understand language during the revision. We have also refreshed the layout and created helpful graphics. The brochure is primarily aimed at those affected and their relatives. However, we know that it is also frequently ordered by healthcare professionals who are confronted with hepatitis B. In 2023, 1,026 copies of this brochure were requested.

There were 569 orders for our hepatitis C brochure. Interested parties can access the brochure free of charge. Both brochures are available to download as a PDF at hepatitis-schweiz.ch and in the Swiss AIDS Federation store.

Media and articles

Our projects and the topic of hepatitis are frequently featured in

the media. We are also authors or co-authors of various specialist articles.

HIV and hepatitis in prison: "One person affected had no idea he was carrying the virus", Tages-Anzeiger, 28.11.2023.

"Eliminating viral hepatitis B and C in times of war and increasing global refugee crisis", Swiss Medical Weekly, 3.4.2023

"Assessing the hepatitis C epidemiology in Switzerland: It is not that trivial", Journal of Viral Hepatitis, 8.8.2023 and 8. 12. 2023

"Hepatitis C is easy to treat in inpatient psychiatry", Psychiatry & Neurology, 2/2023

"Hepatitis C in the general practitioner's office", Schweizerische Ärztezeitung, 14.6.2023

"Elimination of hepatitis C - The potential of pharmacies", Pharma-Journal 8/2023

Online

Our websites hepatitis-schweiz.ch, hepcare.ch, shipp.ch and hep-check.ch recorded over 40,000 visitors in 2023. We also had to deal with introducing the new Data Protection Act. We have adopted the data protection provisions on our websites and set up cookie banners.



Two postings of our Social Media Campaign 2023

CONTROVERSIAL

The debate surrounding the prevalence of hepatitis C

In the middle of the year, a publication appeared in the Journal of Viral Hepatitis that estimates the prevalence of hepatitis C in Switzerland to be significantly lower than previous publications. The authors compiled existing studies and publications in the paper and re-evaluated them. They conclude from their work that the elimination targets of the World Health Organization (WHO) have already been achieved. The publication is controversial. Experts believe the work methodology has weaknesses, and many assumptions have no evidence base. We share this assessment. Furthermore, the publication is only based on already known data, which is known to have gaps. We have written two letters to the editors commenting on the work and listed its weaknesses.

A more recent study, published at the beginning of 2024, also reveals major gaps in the care of patients in OAT programs in the canton of Sankt Gallen. According to this

study, over 40 per cent of those affected have not been diagnosed. This shows that the above publication significantly underestimates the prevalence, at least in this patient group.

However, until more solid figures on the prevalence of the hepatitis C virus in the general population and risk groups are available in Switzerland, we maintain our position that the World Health Organization (WHO) elimination targets have not yet been achieved in our country. Better surveillance and further studies, such as this one from Sankt Gallen, are needed to make reliable statements. The discussion must continue.

Bertisch B et al. 2023: Chronic hepatitis C virus infections in Switzerland in 2020: Lower than expected and suggesting achievement of WHO elimination targets. Journal of Viral Hepatitis. Published on June 6, 2023.

Blach et al. 2023 and Razavi et al. 2023: Letter to the Editor. Assessing the hepatitis C epidemiology in Switzerland: It is not that trivial, Journal of Viral Hepatitis. Published on Aug 8 and Dec 8, 2023.

Wissel et al. 2024: Hepatitis C prevalence and cascade of care among patients in the decentralised opioid agonist therapy programme of the canton of St Gallen, Switzerland: a cross-sectional study. Swiss Medical Weekly. Published on Feb 29, 2024.

PROJECTS

Bel Paese

We were able to consolidate our project aimed at migrant communities last year. We inform and raise awareness among older Italians who immigrated to Switzerland as first-generation migrants. They are up to four times more likely to be affected by hepatitis C than the average population. Infections probably occurred mainly in (para-)medical settings when the hepatitis C virus could not yet be detected.

In 2023, our experienced team, project coordinator Erminia Gagliotta and infectious disease specialist Dr Claudia Bernardini attended ten events in eight cantons, directly reaching 315 people and raising their awareness of hepatitis C. We organised a mailing of information to GPs in the regions where we were present. At the same time, we contacted the Italian-language media.

We are also present on social media, including with a testimonial video from Dr. Bernardini.

SHiPP

Our program for prisons, the Swiss HepFree in Prisons Programme (SHiPP), gained further momentum in 2023. SHiPP supports prison institutions in improving care in relation to viral hepatitis and HIV infection. The aim is to develop best-practice examples that reflect the diverse Swiss prison landscape as much as possible. These should be available to interested institutions wishing to optimise the care of hepatitis and HIV infection.

EPATITE SVIZZERA

PERCHÉ GLI IMMIGRATI ITALIANI RESIDENTI IN SVIZZERA SOPRA I 60 ANNI SONO PARTICOLARMENTE COLPITI DALL'EPATITE C ?

GIOVEDÌ 12.01.2023 - ALLE ORE 21

LA COORDINATRICE DEL PROGETTO BEL PAESE DELL'ASSOCIAZIONE EPATITE SVIZZERA ERMINIA GAGLIOTTA E LA DOTT.SSA CLAUDIA BERNARDINI SPECIALISTA IN MALATTIE INFETTIVE CI SPIEGHERANNO COS'È L'EPATITE C E PERCHÉ TUTTI DOVREBBERO FARE IL TEST DELL'EPATITE C UNA VOLTA NELLA VITA.

ERMINIA GAGLIOTTA
COORDINATRICE EPATITE SVIZZERA

DOTT.SSA CLAUDIA BERNARDINI
SPECIALISTA IN MALATTIE INFETTIVE

LIVE

GIOVEDÌ 12.01.2023 - ORE 21.00
CONDUCTE MARIANNA SICA

WWW.RADIO5.CH **WWW.UNOITALIATV.CH**

Ad for a Bel Paese event with an interview

In 2023, we translated all the material previously available in French and German into Italian. The Epatocentro in Lugano has been won as a partner for Ticino. It supports primary care practitioners who would like to offer the therapy in their practice. A joint mailing to general practitioners in the canton is being planned.

We were also able to recruit six more specialists. A total of 21 specialists from ten cantons are now available for HepCare. The current list can be found at hepcare.ch.

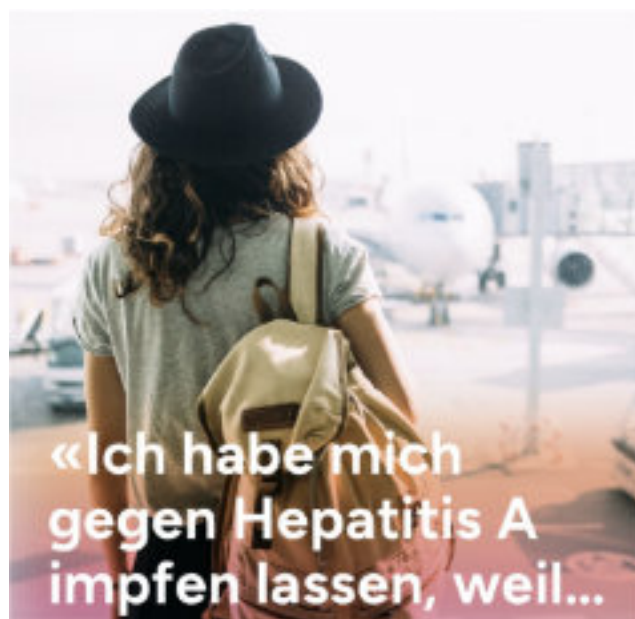
We gave eleven presentations in quality circles, at congresses and as part of webinars for healthcare professionals, which reached around 350 people.

Together with the Bel Paese project, we wrote to 3,200 addresses of GPs in eight cantons and enclosed information about HepCare. As a result, 144 brochures for hepatitis C and 58 brochures for hepatitis B were ordered, as well as 230 information flyers on HepCare and 70 Bel Paese flyers.

A further seven file consultations were recorded from the cantons of Zurich, St. Gallen and Bern.

However, it is becoming increasingly apparent that file consultations are not necessarily a suitable indicator of the project's effectiveness. Motivating the specialists to report the consultations they have carried out to us is becoming increasingly difficult. In addition, we are aware of primary care providers who now carry out hepatitis C therapy independently. The material is, therefore, freely available to everyone.

We have also conceived an online campaign on LinkedIn aimed at GPs. This will be launched at the beginning of 2024.



Posting before the summer break on hepatitis A

SHiPP currently supports prisons with tests, training, and information material in various languages. Projects have been completed in three cantons and are underway in five cantons. We are in contact with other interested institutions.

In 2023, following the illustrated flyer on hepatitis C in simple language, we could also produce a flyer on hepatitis B. These can be ordered online from the Swiss AIDS Federation store.

We also completed an interim evaluation in collaboration with the Institute of Criminology at the University of Bern.

HepCare

HepCare is our offer aimed at primary care providers. The aim is to support general practitioners or psychiatrists in the care of their patients with hepatitis. Primary care providers can now play a more significant role: Since the beginning of 2022, the prescription of hepatitis C medication is no longer restricted to specialists. All doctors can now provide hepatitis C treatment.

HepCare supports them with information materials, checklists, and a circle of specialists available to advise primary care providers. HepCare also offers lectures and training courses.



Our illustrated flyers on hepatitis B are available in 13 languages

Team

Board members

Christophe Bösiger (since 2019)

Prof. Dr. med. Philip Bruggmann
(President, since 2017)

Prof. Dr. med. Andreas Cerny
(since 2017)

Dr. med. Montserrat Fraga
Christinet (since 2018)

Oliver Gut, Zurich (since 2022,
treasurer)

Dr. Patrizia Künzler-Heule
(since 2021)

Dr. med. Daniel Lavanchy,
(since 2017)

Dr. med. Catrina Mugglin
(since 2021)

Dr. med. Claude Scheidegger, Basel
(since 2017)

PD Dr. med. Christine Thurnheer
(since 2020)

Petra Wessalowski (since 2021)

Office

Dr. med. Claudia Bernardini
Specialist physician for the project
Bel Paese

Christophe Bösiger
Project Coordinator HepCare

Erminia Gagliotta
Project Coordinator Bel Paese

Bettina Maeschli
Managing Director

Dr. med. Claude Scheidegger
Project Manager Swiss HepFree in
Prisons Program (SHiPP)

Alexandra Suter, Administration

...as well as the 80 members of the
Network Swiss Hepatitis Strategy.

Thanks

Our sincere thanks go to the donors and sponsors who financially support our activities and projects. Namely, in 2023 these were:

- Abbvie
- Arud Zentrum für Suchtmedizin
- Biotest
- Federal Office for Public Health FOPH
- Gilead Sciences Switzerland Sàrl
- Swiss Conference for the Execution of Justice SKJV
- Swiss Association for the Study of the Liver SASL

Our heartfelt thanks also go to private individuals, foundations, organisations, and institutions that support us and do not wish to be named. Only thanks to this commitment is our work possible.

Many thanks are also due to our partner organisations, which are part of the Swiss Hepatitis Strategy Network and repeatedly support us with contributions in kind or communication services. Last but not least, the network members who make up our base have played a key role in developing and constantly refining the strategy. They all work free of charge and invested around 430 hours in 2023.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT 2023

Balance Sheet

	31.12.2023	31.12.2022
ASSETS		CHF
Cash	219'138	526'406
<u>Receivables form goods and services</u>	7'215	9'600
<u>Other short-term receivables</u>	82'900	12'520
<u>Prepayments and accrued income</u>	1'284	0
Assets	310'537	548'526
LIABILITIES AND EQUITY		
<u>Payables from goods and services</u>	36'150	22'401
<u>Other short-term liabilities</u>	0	4'914
<u>Accrued liabilities and deferred income</u>	14'000	14'616
<u>Current liabilities</u>	50'150	41'931
<u>Fund capital</u>	193'780	437'513
<u>Tied capital</u>	30'000	30'000
<u>Free capital</u>	36'607	39'082
<u>Organisation capital</u>	66'607	68'082
<u>Liabilities and equity</u>	310'537	548'526

Statement of Operations

	2023	2022
OPERATING INCOME		CHF
<u>Donations received</u>	204'520	232'700
<u>Contributions from public authorities</u>	63'319	83'500
<u>Net sales from goods and services</u>	14'830	9'620
Operating income	282'669	325'820
OPERATING EXPENSE		
<u>Project expenditure</u>	-400'951	-278'529
<u>Fundraising and general advertising expenses</u>	-13'209	-2'439
<u>Administrative expenses</u>	-54'717	-56'775
Operating expense	-468'877	-337'743
Operating result	-186'208	-11'923
Extraordinary result	-60'000	0
<u>Result before change in fund capital</u>	-246'208	-11'923
<u>Allocation to project funds</u>	-164'400	-215'500
<u>Appropriation of project funds</u>	408'134	226'973
Change in fund capital	243'734	11'473
Annual result	-2'474	-450

