

EXPANSION OF HEPATITIS C SCREENING AND MANAGEMENT AMONG HIGH-RISK GROUPS IN PUNJAB DURING COVID

Introduction

- Since Hepatitis-C is a blood-borne disease, injecting drug users (IDUs, PLHIVs and other persons) are at very high risk of contracting the disease.
- Recognizing the need to reach out to such high-risk individuals, the Punjab government expanded the horizon of the existing screening and management of Hepatitis-C from passive screening towards active screening and management.
- The active screening program was envisaged in 2017 and further launched in October 2018, to initiate Anti-HCV screening for PLHIVs at ART centers and IDUs at OST sites.

Screening at ART and OST centers

- The project was initiated with the support of FIND (Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics) and now taken over by the State.

Mou between FIND and Health Department was signed by the then Honorable Health Minister Punjab on World Hepatitis Day event in July 2017

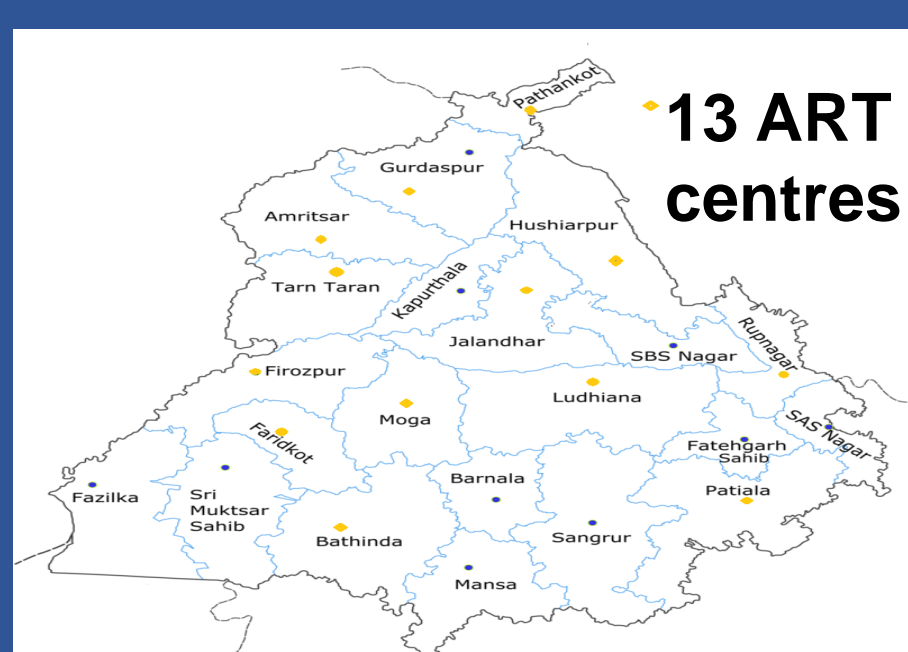
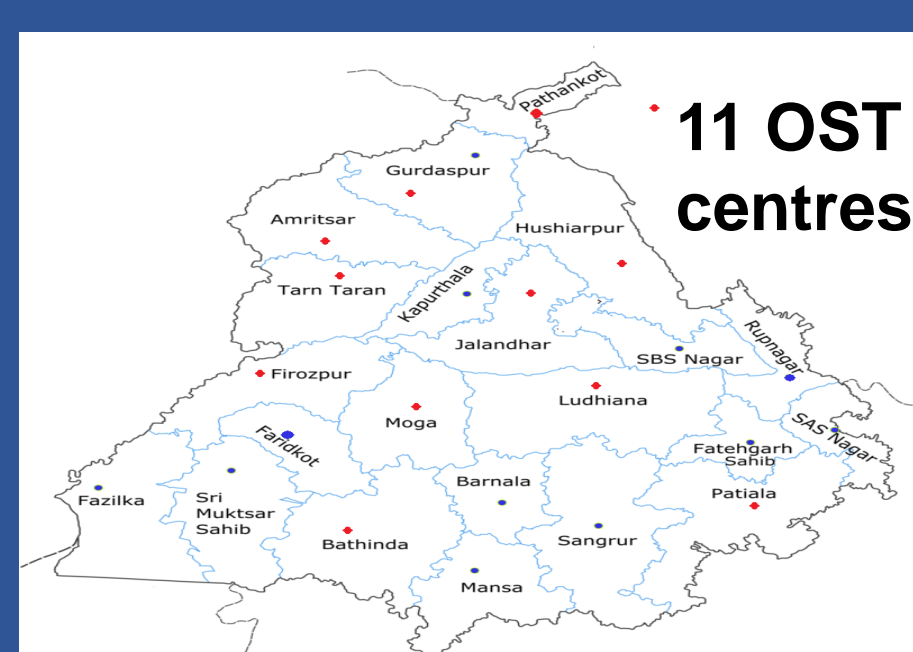


Screening centers mapped to Diagnosis labs in Punjab

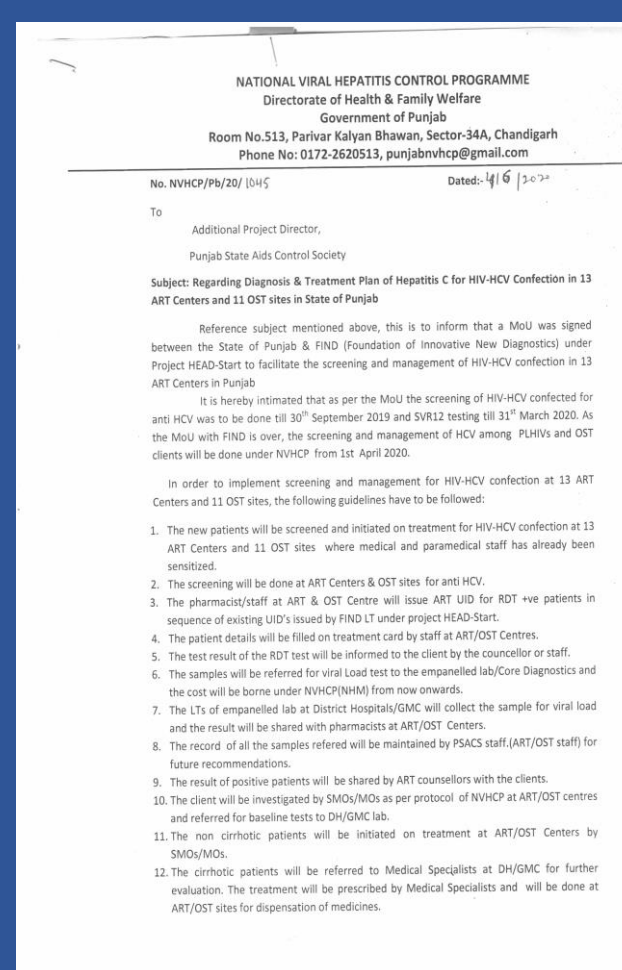
- For Viral load testing four GeneXpert machines were installed at four laboratories by FIND.
- Viral load sample transport networks were mapped to screening centres (ART/OST sites) thus minimizing the sample transport distance, decreasing costs, and optimizing lab capacities.
- By developing simplified data and patient flows screening protocol was developed to scale-up HCV testing to PLHIVs at 13 ART centers and IDUs at co-located 11 OST centers.
- Screening at ART centers started in October-2018 & at OST centers in September 2019.
- Till date, more than 26,823 patients have been screened at ART centres and more than 3459 patients screened at OST center.

HCV Screening during COVID situation

- To facilitate effective outreach to patients, the 13 ART centres and co-located 11 OST centres were designated as Treatment centres in June-2020.
- Under COVID situation it helped ensuring that positive patients get Treatment at the respective sites at the earliest (without delay).



Letter issued by State regarding guidelines to be followed designating 13 ART and 11 OST sites as Treatment centers



Capacity building

- The Medical and Para medical staff of 13 ART and 11 OST sites were sensitized and trained by the experts from PGI and State for screening and management of Hepatitis-C.



Virtual training was organized for Peer Support in July-2020 using ECHO platform for data digitization.

Cost effectiveness

No extra cost is levied to the patient--

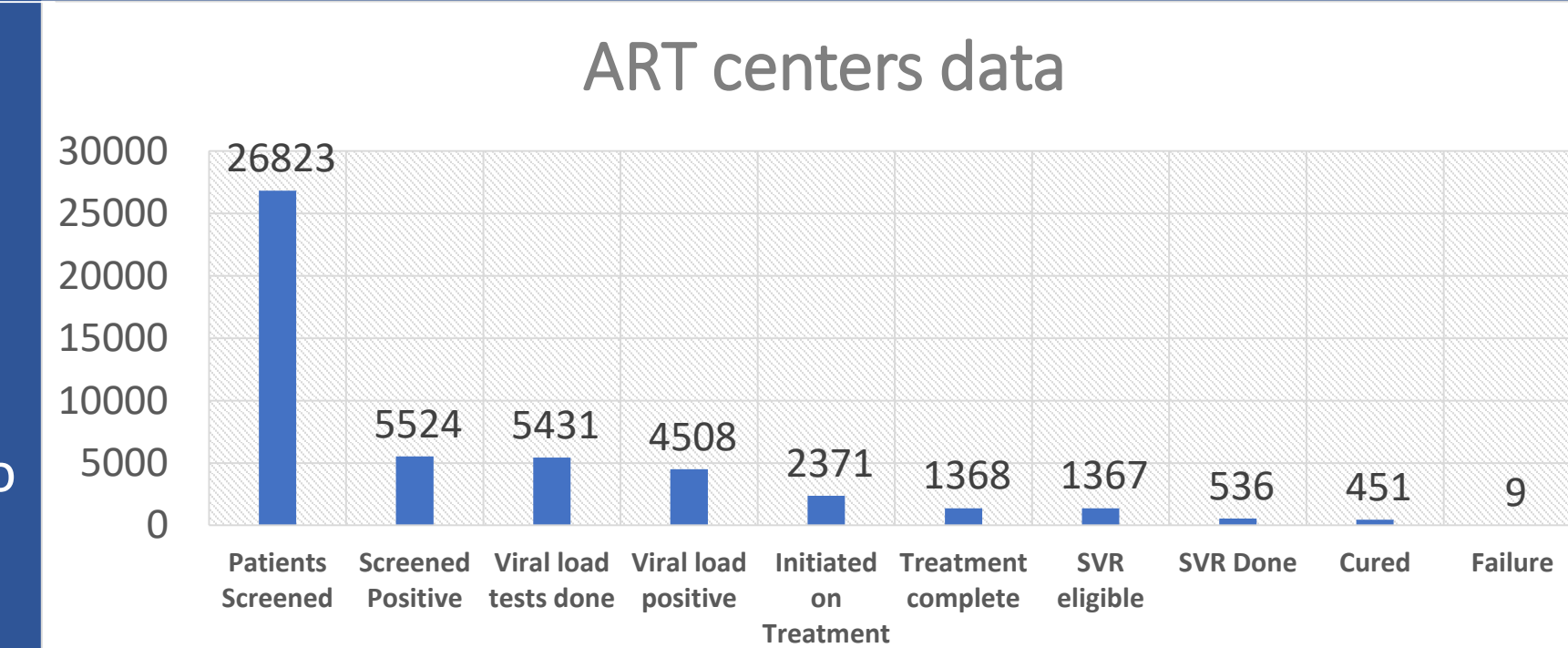
- Screening
- Baseline tests
- Viral load testing
- Medicine
- SVR test post treatment
- Re-treatment

Description and Human Resource

- Non complicated (naïve) cases are treated at respective sites, complicated (cirrhotic) cases are referred to co-located District Hospitals or Government Medical Colleges for assessment, however, the treatment is dispensed from ART/OST site only.
- At ART and OST sites, screening and Treatment initiation is being done by PSACS staff.
- Viral load testing is being done in PPP mode under NVHCP and cost booked under NVHCP.
- Drugs provided to PSACS by NVHCP.
- Online portal entries are done by the Peer Support appointed under NVHCP at the Co-located DH/GMCs

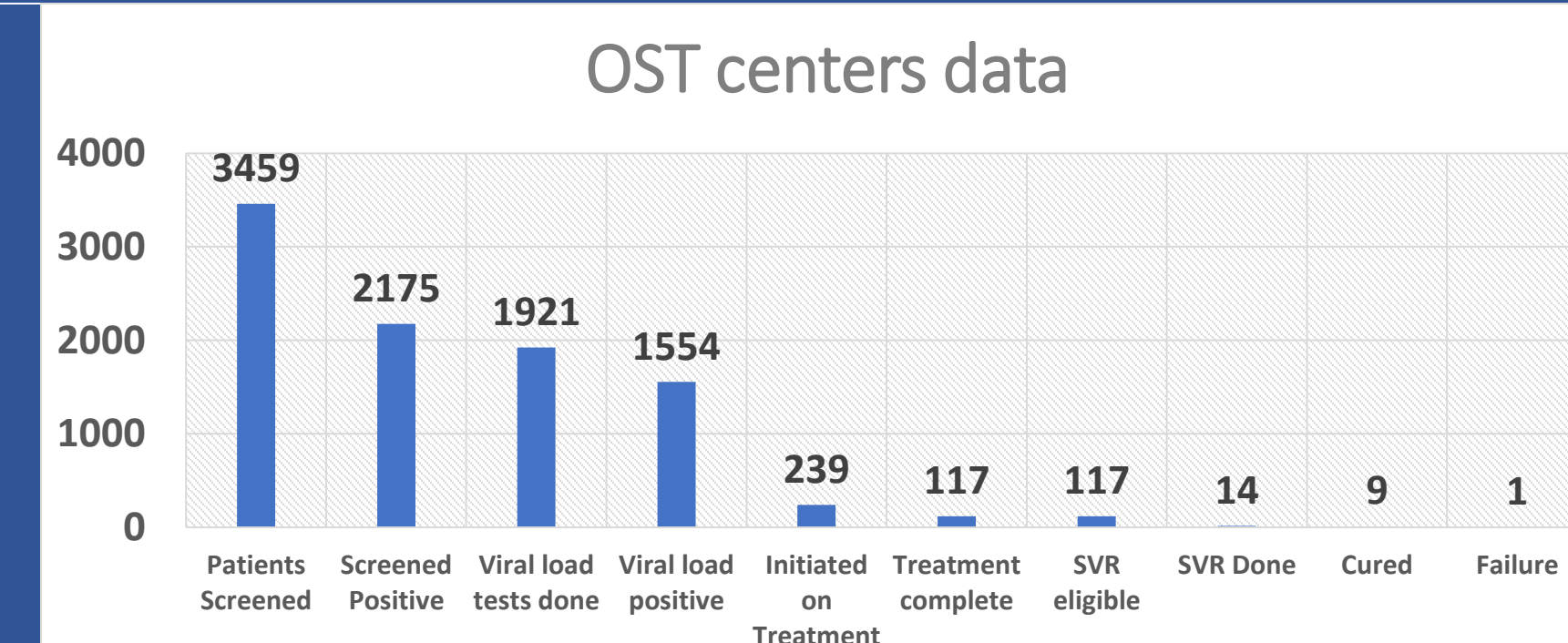
ART Centers

- More than 26, 823 patients screened
- Average positivity of 20.5%, varies from 8% at Pathankot to 44% at Ferozepur.



OST Centers

- More than 3,459 patients screened
- Average positivity of 62.8%, varies from 19% at Pathankot to 80% at Ferozepur.



Outcomes

- Punjab has become the first state to initiate screening of High-risk population (PLHIVs and IDUs) as a programme.
- Screening of all PLHIVs reporting at 13 ART and IDUs at 11 OST centres being done.
- In collaboration with WHO, Punjab become the first state to implement "Injection Safety Implementation Project" thus reducing overall burden of diseases caused by unsafe injection practices and incorrect disposal of used injection waste.
 - Based on this, RUP syringes are being used
- During COVID situation, 13 ART and 11 OST centres designated as Treatment centres thus ensuring that patients complete their treatment without any gap.