

Budget silence not a rejection of hepatitis C therapy funding

Health Minister will soon be able to act

Tens of thousands of Australians awaiting access to ground-breaking hepatitis C therapy should not despair that a PBS listing was not announced as part of the Federal Budget, according to Hepatitis Australia.

“Many in the hepatitis community are concerned that the Health Minister did not include new hepatitis C therapies in the pre-Budget announcement of \$1.3 billion to subsidise high-cost medicines,” said Helen Tyrrell, CEO of Hepatitis Australia.

“We are telling our members that while the PBAC has recommended a subsidy for three new hepatitis C medicines, final price agreements must be reached before the Health Minister can act,” she said.

“The good news is that the Minister confirmed on the weekend that the Abbott Government is committed to listing approved drugs as fast as possible. Minister Ley made it clear that other high-cost medicines – which we assume means the hepatitis C therapies – are now being considered for a government subsidy.”

“The ball will soon be in the Minister’s court and Government will have the opportunity to make 2015 a watershed year for hepatitis C and start us on the path to eliminating this deadly virus.”

Ms Tyrrell explained that new generation antivirals have cure-rates that exceed 90%, a shorter duration of treatment and are much better tolerated than traditional interferon-based therapies. The level of desperation for these new treatments is reflected in reports of Australians planning trips to India or using overseas websites to purchase cheaper and potentially unreliable medicine copies.

“Australians with hepatitis C need certainty around a PBS listing date. They shouldn’t be wasting their money on counterfeit medicines, but nor should they put off treatment for too long and run the risk of irreversible liver disease,” she said.

“While the wait continues for new interferon-free treatments, people with hepatitis C should undergo regular liver health assessments and talk to their doctor to ensure they understand current and future treatment options.”

Sydney-based liver specialist Professor Jacob George added: “People who are actively seeking treatment should discuss the options with their treating doctor. The decision on whether to commence therapy now or wait for interferon-free treatment will depend on each person’s circumstances.”

For more information about hepatitis C treatment visit www.hepatitisaustralia.com

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