

Hepatitis C Inquiry Report welcomed; but urgent action now needed

The report by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health, *The Silent Disease – Inquiry into Hepatitis C in Australia* has been welcomed by the peak body representing the interests of more than 230,000 Australians living with hepatitis C.

The Acting CEO of Hepatitis Australia Kevin Marriott thanked the House of Representatives Committee for their comprehensive report, which included input from more than one hundred submissions and five public hearings.

“The Inquiry has been a landmark moment for Australians living with hepatitis C. It allowed many people to make their voice heard and we thank the Committee for listening and acknowledging the diverse experiences of people impacted by hepatitis C,” he said.

“The report includes a number of important recommendations, including improved data collection and monitoring of progress against the targets in the National Hepatitis C Strategy – which we strongly welcome.”

“The introduction of robust targets to increase testing and supporting the use in Australia of new rapid testing technology is also a step in the right direction.”

However, Hepatitis Australia believes the report falls short in two important areas – affordable access to new generation anti-viral medicines and the prevention of blood borne viruses in correctional settings.

“We are disappointed that the report is silent on recommendations around new treatment options for hepatitis C, which have been deemed cost-effective and are now awaiting a PBS listing date. These therapies offer the opportunity to transform lives and make hepatitis C a rare condition in our lifetime,” Mr Marriott said.

“Hepatitis Australia remains steadfast in its position that there can be no further delay in access to interferon-free medicines for all people living with chronic hepatitis C.”

Mr Marriott also welcomed the Committee’s recommendation that a national strategy be developed to urgently address blood borne viruses in prisons and pointed to evidence that needle and syringe programs significantly reduce rates of hepatitis C transmission.

“Ensuring safe and hygienic tattooing and barbering practises in prisons is essential, as well as trialling a needle and syringe exchange program in at least one Australian prison, with the view to rolling out the strongest possible program nationally,” he said.

“We look forward to the Government acting on the recommendations from the Committee and going one step further – making new hepatitis C medicines affordable as soon as possible, and working to remove barriers to the introduction of needle and syringe programs in prisons.”

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If you are living with hepatitis C, please call the National Infoline on 1300 437 222