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## Recommendations alone will not avert a liver disease epidemic

The Federal Government needs to list new hepatitis C medicines on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) without further delay, according to the peak body representing the interests of a quarter of a million Australians living with the liver-destroying virus.

Responding to the latest round of Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC) recommendations, Hepatitis Australia CEO Helen Tyrrell said a total of four\* groundbreaking curative hepatitis C therapies have now received the green light for inclusion on the PBS but so far no listing date has been confirmed.

“It is a completely unacceptable situation. Recommendations alone will not cure anyone. It’s time to act on the advice of the experts and add these medicines to the PBS,” Ms Tyrrell said.

New anti-viral therapies have exceptionally high cure rates that exceed 90 per cent, shorter treatment durations and avoid the debilitating side-effects associated with existing therapies.

Approximately 230,000 Australians are living with hepatitis C but only one per cent are treated each year. Without urgent access to the new curative treatments, more Australians will progress to serious liver disease, with a 230 per cent increase in the number of deaths due to hepatitis C-related liver disease predicted in the next fifteen years.<sup>1</sup>

Ms Tyrrell said that liver clinics are reporting that hundreds of Australians are deferring treatment and waiting anxiously for the PBS listing of new interferon-free medicines.

“Australians living with hepatitis C have already waited too long to access new treatments. These medicines need to be made available so people can at last be free of the virus allowing them to resume their productive lives,” she said.

Hepatitis Australia is calling for the Federal Government and pharmaceutical companies to swiftly conclude financial negotiations and put patient lives first, saying that “the cost in human suffering far outweighs monetary considerations”.

Ms Tyrrell said that recent reports of Australians importing generic copies of antiviral medication from overseas highlights the desperation of many people and the need for decisive government action to address growing inequities in treatment access based on the ability to pay.

“Hepatitis Australia notes the Federal Health Minister’s support for our World Hepatitis Day #TimeForAction campaign and we urge her to make these vital medicines available. Further delays are unconscionable,” Ms Tyrrell concluded.

\* In March the PBAC recommended three hepatitis C medicines for a PBS listing: sofosbuvir (Sovaldi), ledipasvir/sofosbuvir (Harvoni), and daclatasvir (Daklinza). The July PBAC meeting recommended another treatment option: paritaprevir with ritonavir, ombitasvir and dasabuvir (Viekira Pak with or without ribavirin).

**For further information about #TimeForAction visit [www.hepatitisaustralia.com](http://www.hepatitisaustralia.com)**

**If you have questions about hepatitis C, please call the National Infoline 1800 437 222**

**Media Contact: Fiona Beveridge (0405 902 826) or Dominique Kieft (0403 269 516) at Ethical Strategies – 02 8904 7335**

1. Razavi H, et al. The present and future disease burden of hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection with today’s treatment paradigm *Journal of Viral Hepatitis* 2014, 21, (Suppl.1), 34–59.