

## Tragic cost of delaying access to new cures revealed

Nearly 3,000 Australians with hepatitis C have progressed to severe liver disease in the last year, as thousands continue to wait for affordable access to curative medicines recommended for a government subsidy six months ago.

New surveillance data released by the Kirby Institute reveals the number of Australians living with hepatitis C-related severe liver disease more than doubled in ten years (from 18,582 to 44,730) – 2,800 in 2014 alone. The analysis shows that hepatitis C is the leading cause of liver transplantation in Australia and accounted for an estimated 690 deaths in 2014 – a 146 per cent increase in deaths over a ten year period.<sup>1</sup>

Hepatitis Australia's Acting CEO, Kevin Marriott said that the data provides compelling evidence for new and improved hepatitis C therapies to be made available on the PBS without delay.

"Interferon-free therapies will allow the vast majority of people living with the hepatitis C virus to be cured, even where treatment has failed previously and without the terrible side-effects of existing treatments.

"It's time for the Federal Government to act on the advice of its experts and make these new cures widely available before more people progress to serious liver disease and die," Mr Marriott said.

Professor Greg Dore from the Kirby Institute in Sydney warned that without a significant improvement in hepatitis C treatment rates, Australia would see a 245 per cent increase in rates of liver cancer and a 230 per cent increase in hepatitis C-related deaths by 2030.<sup>2</sup>

"Thousands of Australians are queuing up waiting for new medicines to be PBS listed. These treatments provide one of the great breakthroughs in clinical medicine in recent decades, with enormous potential to improve the lives of people living with hepatitis C," Professor Dore said.

Hepatitis Australia warned that Australia is failing to meet the Federal Government's National Strategy target of increasing hepatitis C treatment rates by 50 per cent year-on-year. Only one per cent of the 230,500 people living with hepatitis C received treatment last year, according to the Kirby Institute's surveillance data.

"New interferon-free hepatitis C therapies provide a golden opportunity to turn around Australia's abysmally low treatment rates and prevent liver disease and death," Mr Marriott said.

"It's time for action. It's time for the Federal Government to make new therapies widely available, increase liver clinic capacity, upscale hepatitis C treatment and prevention programs, and transform the lives of thousands of Australians," he said.

**National Infoline: 1800 437 222 or visit [www.hepatitisaustralia.com](http://www.hepatitisaustralia.com)**

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

### References

1. Kirby Institute Annual Surveillance Report 2015.
2. 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.