



24 September 2015

The Hon. Sussan Ley MP
Minister for Health
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

Time for New Cures – Time to list new hepatitis C medicines

It is rare that a government has the power to change the course of an epidemic but that is the historic opportunity available to you and your colleagues.

Australia is at a crossroads. Down one path lies escalating rates of liver disease and death. Down the other, there is an opportunity to make hepatitis C a rare condition in our lifetime.

The twenty-seven organisations which are signatories to this letter acknowledge your commitment to respond to the needs of healthcare consumers and reimburse new therapies that treat conditions ranging from cancer to eye disease. As such, we urge you to expedite price negotiations and confirm the addition of the new breakthrough hepatitis C medicines on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme without delay.

These new treatments cure hepatitis C and represent a lifeline for many people. Yet despite being recommended by the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee six months ago, these medicines are still awaiting consideration by the Federal Cabinet.

With exceptionally high cure rates, shorter treatment duration and fewer side-effects than existing therapies, interferon-free medicines hold the key to preventing liver cirrhosis, liver cancer and liver failure – not to mention halting the rising death toll associated with untreated hepatitis C.

As you know, treatment rates remain lamentably low. Only one per cent of the 230,500 Australians living with hepatitis C are treated each year. This puts thousands at risk of progressing to serious liver disease.

Of further concern are reports by liver clinic staff that hepatitis C treatment rates have plummeted again as more and more people find themselves in a treatment limbo.

Sadly, Australia can no longer regard itself the “lucky country”; not when people with hepatitis C are being cured around the globe – from the United States and Great Britain to Egypt and India. Increasingly, desperate Australians are being forced to travel overseas, or take the risky course of importing medicines because these new therapies remain unaffordable in Australia.

Minister, it's time for action. It's time for you to intervene and bring the Department, the pharmaceutical companies and the Cabinet together to deliver the cures for which so many Australians are desperately waiting.

We implore you to embrace a new treatment era, to confirm a PBS listing date and make 2015 a watershed year in the fight against hepatitis C.

Yours faithfully,



Helen Tyrrell - CEO Hepatitis Australia

On behalf of the twenty-seven organisations listed below.

- Aboriginal Sobriety Group
- Anglicare – Tasmania
- Australian Federation of AIDS organisations.
- Australian Hepatology Association
- Australian Injecting & Illicit Drug Users League (AIVL)
- Australian Research Centre in Sex Health & Society
- Australasian Society for Infectious Diseases
- Australasian Society for HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexual Health Medicine
- Centre for Social Research in Health
- Gastroenterological Society of Australia including the Australian Liver Association
- Haemophilia Foundation Australia
- Hepatitis Australia
- Hepatitis ACT
- Hepatitis NSW
- Hepatitis Queensland
- Hepatitis SA
- Hepatitis Victoria
- Hepatitis WA
- National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
- National Association of People with HIV Australia.
- Northern Territory AIDS and Hepatitis Council
- Penington Institute
- Peter Doherty Institute for Infection and Immunity
- SHine SA
- Tasmanian Council on AIDS, Hepatitis and Related Diseases
- Uniting Care Wesley – Port Adelaide
- Uniting Communities

C.C.

Senator the Hon Fiona Nash, Minister for Rural Health
Senator the Hon Ken Wyatt, Assistant Minister for Health