

Christmas comes early for Australians living with hepatitis C

Thousands of Australians will rejoice at today's announcement by Federal Health Minister Sussan Ley that a range of curative breakthrough hepatitis C medicines* will be added to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme next year.

Hepatitis Australia CEO Helen Tyrrell said that it was "simply terrific" that new ground-breaking medicines for hepatitis C would be subsidised on the PBS from 1 March 2016.

"Last week, we were incredibly disheartened that the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO) announcement did not include funding for new hepatitis C medicines, but today we are overjoyed that the waiting is almost over," Ms Tyrrell said.

"So many people have been anxiously waiting for this announcement. This is wonderful news and it is such a relief to have an end to the uncertainty," she said.

"We congratulate Minister Ley who has delivered on her commitment to list these medicines as swiftly as she can and to make them available for everyone with hepatitis C, which hasn't been achieved elsewhere.

"Christmas will be a particularly joyous time this year for many living with hepatitis C as they can now look forward to the prospect of a cure and a much healthier future," Ms Tyrrell said.

"The Turnbull Government is to be congratulated for showing leadership and investing in these game-changing therapies which represent the greatest innovation in the treatment of the hepatitis C virus in a generation," she said.

"If we can combine access to new treatments with improved access to needle and syringe programs across the country and in all populations, we have a real chance of preventing deaths and eliminating hepatitis C as a public health concern within a generation.

"We look forward to 2016 as the watershed year for hepatitis C in Australia as more people are treated and cured and we start to arrest spiralling rates of liver disease," Ms Tyrrell added.

230,500 Australians are living with the hepatitis C virus which damages the liver, leading to liver scarring (cirrhosis), liver cancer and liver failure. Each month approximately 250 people with hepatitis C develop serious and potentially life-threatening liver disease or liver cancer.

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

"We urge all Australians with risk factors for hepatitis C to get tested and talk to their doctor about new treatments," Ms Tyrrell concluded.

*sofosbuvir (Sovaldi); sofosbuvir and ledipasvir (Harvoni); daclatasvir (Daklinza) and ribavirin (Ibavyr).

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