

## **Opportunity to turnaround Australia's low treatment rates 'must not be missed'**

Nearly a quarter of a million Australians with chronic hepatitis C may soon have a new treatment option following the approval of Sovaldi® (sofosbuvir) by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA).

Hepatitis Australia welcomed the TGA listing as the first step towards making this transformative new treatment – which has a very high cure rate combined with low side-effects – available to all Australians who might benefit from it.

Hepatitis Australia's President, Terry Higgins said, "The approval of a new treatment for people with hepatitis C represents a huge opportunity to turnaround Australia's lamentably low treatment rates.

"However this opportunity cannot be realised until the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee recommends the medicine for listing on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and the Government subsidises the medication to make it widely available." he said

Following the TGA's approval of Sovaldi, a physician can write a prescription for the medicine, but the full cost of the medicine will have to be paid by the patient, until the Government subsidises the medicine under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

Hepatitis Australia's Acting CEO, Kevin Marriott, said that without a Government subsidy for this medicine, there will be an 'insurmountable' financial barrier to accessing the treatment for the vast majority of people living with hepatitis C.

"Australia already has appallingly low treatment rates – less than 1 per cent of people with hepatitis C receive treatment, and we are already seeing escalating rates of serious liver disease as a result.

"Many people with hepatitis do not display symptoms until their liver starts to fail, so it is important that people who know they are living with hepatitis, or who think they might have been exposed to the virus, speak to their doctor about treatment.

"With the Government launching new National Strategies on viral hepatitis, we need all Australians to have equal access to this medicine without delay," Mr Marriott concluded.

**For further information or to arrange an interview, please contact Fiona Beveridge (0405 902 826) at Ethical Strategies – 02 8904 7335.**

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