

Call for action on hepatitis C elimination: Australian GPs pledge to raise number of people treated by GPs to over 10,000 per year by 2025

Media Release

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Adelaide, South Australia

***Empowering primary care* has been the central theme underpinning a one-day forum held in Adelaide today, where a delegation of 50 general practitioners (GP) from all Australian States and Territories called their fellow primary care providers to action through the launch of the *Aus GPs End Hep C* statement.**

General Practitioner Dr Joss O'Loan said the delegation is committed to empowering GPs to treat people with hepatitis C (hep C) in primary care and priority settings, by setting goals and sharing strategies for success.

"The *Aus GPs End Hep C* statement is calling for action to address the urgent need for many more Australian primary care providers to get on board with the screening, treatment and management of hepatitis C," said Dr O'Loan, the statement's primary author and one of its founding signatories.

"This is the first time a collective of GPs from around Australia have stood up together to take ownership of this pressing issue. Our role at the frontline of primary health care in Australia is critical if we are to achieve the target of hep C elimination [as set by the World Health Organisation] by 2030."

"Australia's access to direct acting antiviral (DAA) therapy is the envy of primary care physicians around the world, and yet, currently only 10% of GPs in Australia have written a DAA script. Through the Statement, we commit to an ambitious goal of raising this to 20% by 2020 – and bringing the number of patients with hep C being treated by GPs to more than 10,000 per year by 2025."

"We are now calling on our primary care peers to get involved and work towards these goals. It falls on GPs to raise our game, keep our shoulders to the wheel and liberate our patients from the tyranny of hepatitis C."

Infectious diseases physician Professor Greg Dore, Head of the Viral Hepatitis Clinical Research Program at The Kirby Institute, UNSW Sydney, continues.

"Australia has laid the foundation for HCV elimination, particularly with involvement of GPs in prescribing. Greater investment is required, however, to increase GP prescribing, and turnaround declining treatment numbers. GPs can drive us to achieve our ambitious goals."

Dr Sam Elliott, another of the Statement's founding signatories, concurs with the responsibility of GPs in improving the cascade of care for people living with hepatitis C.

"For people living with hep C, receiving treatment in familiar environments with their trusted, accessible, long-term doctor removes an important barrier to treatment. Treatment in primary care is suitable for the majority of people living with hep C, yet currently only around 40% of DAA scripts are written by GPs. Through the Statement, we are setting a goal to raise this to 75% by 2025. We need Australian GPs to

acknowledge that hep C screening and treatment is now core general practice work, sitting alongside diabetes, skin cancer and mental health.”

CEO of Hepatitis Australia Helen Tyrrell adds her voice addressing the need to remove barriers of stigma and discrimination as experienced by those living with hepatitis C accessing health-care settings.

“The stigma surrounding hepatitis C can often act as a barrier to care. However, stigma may be less of a concern once people know they can see their GP to access treatment. The trust relationship between GPs and their patients is absolutely vital to improving access to care. We want GPs to take up the challenge and be much more involved in identifying and treating people with hepatitis C, and by doing so they will be contributing to the goal of eliminating hepatitis C in Australia.”

Access the Aus GPs End Hep C Statement

- GPs and primary health care can find out more and/or become a signatory to the **Aus GPs End Hep C Statement** at bit.ly/AusGPsEndHepC

Links to Clinical Resources supporting the hepatitis C workforce

- ASHM support the primary health workforce in hepatitis C with best practice in guidelines, training and resources – visit <http://ashm.org.au/HCV/>
- Australian medical practitioners who are not experienced in hepatitis C treatment can gain specialist approval or further guidance to initiate DAA therapy for their patients in 24 hours by completing the REACH-C online form – visit <http://www.reach-c.ashm.org.au/>

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About ASHM

Australasian Society for HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexual Health Medicine (ASHM) is a peak organisation of health professionals in Australia and New Zealand who work in HIV, viral hepatitis and sexually transmissible infections (STIs). ASHM draws on its experience and expertise to support the health workforce and to contribute to the sector, domestically and internationally. www.ashm.org.au

The ASHM-run [1-day Treating Hepatitis C in General Practice Forum](#) was funded by **The Kirby Institute**.

About the Kirby Institute

The Kirby Institute is a leading global research institute dedicated to the prevention and treatment of infectious diseases. They were established in 1986 in response to the then emerging HIV epidemic. They now contribute to knowledge on a broad range of diseases, including viral hepatitis and sexually transmissible infections. <https://kirby.unsw.edu.au>