



AVHEC

Australasian Viral Hepatitis
Elimination Conference 2017

Thursday 10 - Friday 11 August 2017

Pullman Cairns International

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Media Release

COLLABORATION KEY TO VIRAL HEPATITIS SUCCESS

(Cairns: Thursday, 10 August 2017): Australia is poised to be one of the first countries in the world to eliminate hepatitis C, according to experts gathered at the [Australasian Viral Hepatitis Elimination Conference](#) in Cairns today.

This is thanks to its collaborative approach, which has brought together health professionals, researchers, policy makers and community, and has resulted in the implementation of effective, evidence-based strategies.

“We find ourselves in the incredible position we are today, where viral hepatitis might actually be eliminated from our country within ten years, because of our ability to share knowledge and work together.

“Through our collaboration, Australia has introduced trail blazing policies that are the envy of the world, supported by evidence, and embraced by patients and practitioners alike. To reach our goals we must ensure that this continues,” said Associate Professor Gail Matthews, Convenor of the Conference, and Viral Hepatitis Clinical Researcher at the Kirby Institute.

Australia is one of the only countries in the world to offer hepatitis C treatments free and without restrictions based on a patient’s stage of liver disease or current injecting behaviours. In addition, treatments can be prescribed by general practitioners and nurse practitioners, removing the barrier of needing specialist care.

Just last month another new hepatitis C cure, Epclusa, was added to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) that could significantly accelerate Australia’s cure rate still further. The drug can be used successfully with all six genotypes of hepatitis C and is far easier to prescribe. This has particular significance for remote and rural Australia where, in contrast to the rest of the country, hepatitis C rates are actually increasing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Australia’s viral hepatitis elimination targets also include the elimination of hepatitis B – a blood-borne virus particularly prevalent in parts of Asia and the Pacific, where it is primarily spread through mother-to-child transmission. In Australia, two-thirds of the more than 200 000 people living with the disease were born overseas in endemic countries, or identify as being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

There is, however, a vaccine, and in Australia this is provided to all infants through the National Immunisation Program (NIP) resulting in 96 per cent of two-year-olds being vaccinated. From July 1 this year, all 10 to 19 year-olds and all refugees and other humanitarian entrants can also receive this vaccine for free through the NIP.



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“These latest breakthroughs in medical technology combined with legislation to ensure affordability and availability place elimination within our reach. But to mobilise all the people with or at risk of viral hepatitis and connect them to services is going to be a major challenge.

- We need more clinicians to deliver treatment.
- We need awareness and education so that people at risk know these treatments exist.
- We need to increase diagnosis and have integrated prevention and harm reduction programs.
- And we must always be ready to adapt our approach so that we can ensure everyone can benefit from these advances, and that no one is left behind,” she said.

The Viral Hepatitis Conference in Cairns provides a unique opportunity for all people working in this field to share latest scientific research, evaluate lessons learnt, and have structured dialogue to determine Australia’s ongoing response.

ABOUT THE AUSTRALASIAN VIRAL HEPATITIS ELIMINATION CONFERENCE

The inaugural Australasian Viral Hepatitis Elimination Conference 2017 organised by the [Australasian Society for HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexual Health Medicine](http://www.ashm.org.au) (ASHM) is taking place at the Pullman Cairns International, Cairns, Queensland, 10–11 August 2017. It brings together those working in the field of Viral Hepatitis: policy makers, researchers, primary health care providers, community and other individuals committed towards viral hepatitis elimination. For more information visit the AVHEC 2017 Conference website at www.avhec.com.au.

Primary Care Providers play a vital role in delivering treatment and management. Become a prescriber. For more information visit the ASHM website at www.ashm.org.au.

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