

John Ratchford
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Dear John,

Thanks for your questions on Federal Labor's approach to a range of issues associated with Hepatitis.

Please accept my apologies for the delay in responding. I hope you understand that this is an unavoidable consequence of the demands of the election period.

My responses to your questions can be found below.

1a. Does your party support a sensitive mass media campaign to educate the broader community about hepatitis C?

Federal Labor recognises the need to promote awareness of hepatitis C. We are committed to working with stakeholders to identify the most effective and appropriate approach for achieving this objective.

1b. Will your party commit to advocating within the new Parliament for adequate resourcing of a hepatitis C mass media campaign?

Federal Labor would seek to ensure that any efforts to promote greater community awareness of hepatitis C were appropriately resourced.

2a. Does your party support the expansion of hepatitis C treatment access points to improve treatment uptake?

Frontline treatment of conditions such as hepatitis C is primarily the responsibility of state and territory health departments. Nevertheless, Federal Labor has no in principle objection to the expansion of hepatitis C treatment access points to non-hospital settings. Federal Labor believes in expanding the role of non-hospital health care services (e.g. primary health care) to enable people to seek treatment where possible in local communities and to relieve the pressure on hospitals.

2b. Will your party commit to funding of clinical trials of different modes of treatment for hepatitis C?

Federal Labor acknowledges that clinical trials of different modes of treatment for hepatitis C could potentially play an important role in helping to improve treatment uptake.

3a. Will your party support the development of a comprehensive National Hepatitis B Strategy and commencement of implementation by 2009?

In Government, we would consult widely in relation to the most appropriate strategy for ensuring that Australia's response to hepatitis B is as effective as possible.

3b. Will your party commit to the provision of adequate infrastructure within community organisations to facilitate their participation as partners in the development of the National Hepatitis B Strategy?

In Government Labor would consult widely in relation to the most appropriate infrastructure for ensuring that Australia's response to hepatitis B is effective.

4a. Does your party support the provision of successfully proven harm reduction programs such as methadone and needle and syringe programs?

Federal Labor supports a range of approaches, including supply reduction and promotion of awareness of the risks associated with drug use.

4b. Will your party commit to advocating within the new parliament for provision of funding incentives to the states and territories to ensure expansion of access to needle syringe programs?

Federal Labor would consult with the States and Territories about funding for current programs.

5a. Will your party advocate within the new Parliament for the implementation of the Hepatitis C Prevention, Treatment and Care: Guidelines for Australian Custodial Settings?

Federal Labor recognises the particular challenges posed by the high rates of Hepatitis C among prisoners. This is a significant public health concern both for prisoners and the broader community. While we cannot commit to the Guidelines before they have been made available, we will examine them closely upon their release.

5b. Does your party support the expansion of harm reduction programs to custodial settings?

As far as we are aware, a range of programs currently exist in custodial settings in Australia's states and territories (e.g. methadone treatment programs). These are matter for State and Territory Governments

6a. Will your party commit to advocating within parliament for increased funds specifically targeting hepatitis C and hepatitis B research across all streams (basic science, clinical, social, viral and epidemiology)?

Federal Labor recognises the importance of specific research into hepatitis B and C across all research streams. In Government, we would seek to ensure that this research is appropriately funded.

7a. Will your party commit to on-going support to hepatitis community organisations for their work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities around viral hepatitis education and prevention programs?

Federal Labor understands that there is a particular problem with viral hepatitis in Indigenous communities. In Government, we would seek to work in partnership with hepatitis community organisations and Indigenous communities to address this problem.

8a. Will your party commit to endorsing May 19th as World Hepatitis Day from 2008?

Federal Labor believes in the importance of raising awareness of hepatitis and will consider endorsing May 19th as World Hepatitis Day.

8b. Will your party commit to advocating within the new parliament for specific funding for raising awareness of hepatitis B and C within Australia in association with World Hepatitis Day?

If World Hepatitis Day was endorsed by the World Health Organisation, a Rudd labor Government would consider providing appropriate funding for awareness raising activities that might be conducted in conjunction with this day.

I trust these responses have clarified these issues for you.

Sincerely,

Nicola Roxon
Shadow Minister for Health

