

PRESS RELEASE – MAY 19

WORLD HEPATITIS ALLIANCE CALLS ON GOVERNMENTS TO TAKE URGENT ACTION TO TACKLE CHRONIC VIRAL HEPATITIS B & C EPIDEMIC

Alarming lack of global statistics prompts creation of first global resource on hepatitis: The Hepatitis Atlas

Monday 19 May, 2008 – The World Hepatitis Alliance, today called on governments around the world to drive improvements in prevention, diagnosis, treatment and support for the one in 12 people worldwide infected with either chronic viral hepatitis B or C^{1, 2}.

Helen Tyrrell, CEO of Hepatitis Australia and founding member of the World Hepatitis Alliance says “The World Health Organization has estimated that over 350 million people on the planet are living with chronic viral hepatitis B and more than 170 million are living with chronic hepatitis C but there is an astonishing lack of awareness and in some countries political will to tackle these diseases.

“Many experts refer to viral hepatitis as a hidden epidemic; our aim is to make sure it does not become a forgotten epidemic.”

Marking the first ever international World Hepatitis Day, the World Hepatitis Alliance today launched “The Hepatitis Atlas: Completing the Data Map” – a resource designed to become the first global public compendium of statistics and information relating to chronic viral hepatitis B and C. The Hepatitis Atlas has been launched as a result of the shocking lack of up-to-date global statistics relating to the two viruses.

Helen Tyrrell, CEO of Hepatitis Australia, said the current lack of data available globally means that many governments are simply working in the dark.

“There is an urgent need to ensure chronic viral hepatitis B and C are high up on healthcare agendas both in Australia and around the globe. Taking action to curb hepatitis B and hepatitis C now rather than later has economic benefits, lessens the burden on our health system and is the most socially responsible course of action” said Ms. Tyrrell.

Hepatitis Australia has joined its World Hepatitis Alliance colleagues in asking the Australian Government to sign up to 12 Asks for 2012 aimed at combating chronic viral hepatitis B and C. The 12 Asks are a series of requests for commitment from the Government to recognise the significant impact of the disease and in Australia and the importance of adopting measures that address the issue from a public health perspective.

In Australia, it is estimated 90,000 to 160,000³ people are living with chronic hepatitis B, and 200,000⁴ people are living with chronic hepatitis C. These numbers are growing annually.

“The challenge for viral hepatitis is to make healthcare authorities and policy makers aware that this disease, if not tackled today, will be a major burden in the next 20 years as today’s patients will develop liver cancer. It is better to act today than be unable to react tomorrow,” said Professor Greg Dore, Head of the Viral Hepatitis Clinical Research Program, National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research, University of New South Wales, and one of 12 members of the World Hepatitis Alliance Public Health Panel.

Professor Dore added, “Increased awareness and understanding of the public health impact of chronic viral hepatitis is required to mobilise action on proven prevention and care strategies. Awareness raising will promote advocacy, improve global funding, and reduce the stigma and discrimination that affect many people with chronic viral hepatitis.”

Numerous education and awareness activities will be held around the nation aimed at increasing the knowledge and understanding of health care professionals, community workers, Aboriginal health care workers, policy makers and government.

Check the Hepatitis Australia website www.hepatitisaustralia.com for listing of events in various states.

Did You Know?

- 500 million people worldwide are currently living with chronic hepatitis B or C
- The number of people living with chronic hepatitis is more than 10 times the number living with HIV/AIDS
- Between them, chronic hepatitis B and C kill 1.5 million people a year
- One in every three people on the planet has been exposed to either or both viruses
- Most of the 500 million with chronic viral hepatitis do not know they are infected

World Hepatitis Day

World Hepatitis Day is observed on Monday 19 May and marks a brand new, entirely community led initiative. The 2008 World Hepatitis Day campaign theme is “Am I Number 12?,” a concept designed to communicate the shocking statistic that one in 12 people worldwide are living with either hepatitis B or hepatitis C. Despite the fact 500 million people worldwide are affected by viral hepatitis, awareness remains inexplicably low. World Hepatitis Day aims to raise awareness of chronic viral hepatitis B and C globally and encourage people to get tested.

World Hepatitis Alliance

World Hepatitis Day is coordinated by the World Hepatitis Alliance, a newly established Non-Governmental Organisation representing more than 200 hepatitis B and hepatitis C community and patient groups from around the world. The World Hepatitis Alliance is governed by a representative board of patient and community groups from seven world regions: Europe, Eastern Mediterranean, North Africa, North America, South America, Australasia and Western Pacific. For more information visit www.worldhepatitisday.com on Monday 19 May.

Hepatitis Australia

Hepatitis Australia was incorporated in 1997 as the peak community organization to progress national action on issues of importance to people affected by hepatitis C. Our mission is to provide leadership and advocacy on viral hepatitis and support partnerships to ensure the needs of Australians affected by or at risk of viral hepatitis are met. Our members are the eight state and territory councils.

World Hepatitis Day is endorsed by the following organisations:

The Pharmacy Guild of Australia | National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation | The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners | Australasian Hepatology Association | Association of Prevention and Harm Reduction Programs Australia | Australian Injecting & Illicit Drug Users League | Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, Australasian Society for HIV medicine | Australian Chinese Medical Association | Hepatitis C Resource Centre Te Waipounamu | Multicultural HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C Service | National Centre in HIV Social Research | Public Health Association Australia | Haemophilia Foundation Australia | National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research | Australian Liver Association | Cancer Council NSW

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¹ World Health Organization. Hepatitis B Fact Sheet: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs204/en/index.html> (accessed 1 May, 2008)

² Initiative for Vaccine Research, Viral Cancers, Hepatitis C. World Health Organization, 2006.
http://www.who.int/vaccine_research/diseases/viral_cancers/en/index2.html (accessed 1 May, 2008)

³ Hepatitis in Australia: Responding to a diverse epidemic: <http://www.hepatitisaustralia.com/documents/acthbv.pdf> (accessed 1 May, 2008)

⁴ HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis & sexually Transmissible Infections in Australia Annual Surveillance Report
[http://www.nchecr.unsw.edu.au/NCHECRweb.nsf/resources/SurvRep07/\\$file/ASR2007.PDF](http://www.nchecr.unsw.edu.au/NCHECRweb.nsf/resources/SurvRep07/$file/ASR2007.PDF) (accessed 1 May, 2008)