

Media Release

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50 per cent of injections are still done with an unsterile syringe, Australian study reveals.

30 million needles and syringes distributed every year in Australia over the past decade have ensured that 97,000 hepatitis C infections have been averted, yet 50 per cent of all injections are still with an unsterile syringe, proof the system is failing Australians.

The findings of the latest report, released today by researchers at UNSW's National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research, *Return on Investment 2: Evaluating the cost-effectiveness of needle and syringe programs in Australia*,¹ demonstrate that an increase in funding of needle and syringe programs is needed to curb the hepatitis C epidemic.

"At present, approximately 50 per cent of all injections are with an unsterile syringe, yet the reality is people who inject drugs are unlikely to use another person's injecting equipment if they have convenient access to sterile needles and syringes," said Stuart Loveday, Vice President, Hepatitis Australia.

"The system is failing Australians. The supply of injecting equipment is currently limited and not meeting the demand, governments must invest in expanding needle and syringe programs as this report clearly demonstrates the benefits to both individuals and the economy".

Needle and syringe programs save lives, and are not only cost-effective, but cost-saving. For every dollar invested, four dollars are returned, as life threatening hepatitis C and HIV infections and associated healthcare costs are averted.

"The evidence is clear. Australia needs to invest further in needle and syringe programs, and expand their reach, as 10,000 new hepatitis C infections each year is too many," said Loveday.

"There is room to expand the needle and syringe program."

"The \$243 million spent on needle and syringe programs from 2000-2009 by the Federal and State governments, whilst saving \$1,280 million in averted healthcare costs nationwide, could be bettered," said Loveday.

"A separate study has demonstrated that if there were a doubling of the amount of injecting equipment distributed, effectively decreasing the number of times each syringe is shared, new hepatitis C infections would be halved."

For further information or to co-ordinate an interview with available spokespeople please contact:

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¹ The report was commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.

Note:

Further information about hepatitis C can be found at www.hepatitisaustralia.com.au or you can call the national infoline, 1300 HEP ABC (1300 437 222).