



**National Hepatitis C Treatment Awareness Week  
23-27 May 2005**

**Over 30,000 with the potential to Get Hep C Free**

Embargoed until 9am Sunday May 22

A quarter of a million Australians have hepatitis C yet less than 1300 of the 30,000 currently eligible for treatment under the PBS accessed it in 2003.

Hepatitis C Awareness Week is to inform GPs and people with hepatitis C that access to treatment, its success rate and management of side effects have all improved. Treatment might be something they want to look into.

The revolutionary treatment, pegylated interferon and ribavirin, is successful in treating 60% of people with hepatitis C, curing them of the virus and avoiding cirrhosis and potentially liver cancer. For people with different 'genotypes' of hepatitis C their chance of being cured can be as high as 80%.

Stuart Loveday, President of the Australian Hepatitis Council said, "The listing of combination pegylated interferon and interferon, the best available treatment, on the PBS in 2003 was a great step forward for people with hepatitis C."

"Before the new treatment, side effects could be severe and difficult to manage and it was difficult to access. Worse still, the old treatments had a much lower success rate. People with hepatitis C have heard horror stories over the last 10 years from their friends about treatment" said Mr Loveday

Research illustrates that people with hepatitis C, their GPs and health professionals are not yet aware of the improvements in accessing treatment. Also, that the management of side effects has improved with the new treatment regime.

Hepatitis C related liver disease is already the leading cause for liver transplants in Australia and without an increase in treatment uptake there will be 25,000 people with hepatitis C related cirrhosis by 2020.

Community events and information sessions with General Practitioners will be conducted throughout Awareness Week by state and territory Hepatitis Councils.

**For more information contact Danielle Elston on 0423 208 289**

**Interviews can be organised with doctors, people with hepatitis C and representatives of the national and state/territory hepatitis C councils.**

**Information about Hepatitis C Awareness Week can be found at [www.hepcawareness.net.au](http://www.hepcawareness.net.au)**

**Hepatitis C Media Centre: [www.hepatitisaustralia.com/media](http://www.hepatitisaustralia.com/media)**