



Australian Hepatitis Council

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Hepatitis C strategy launched – now for the hard part**

“We’ve got an epidemic, we’ve got a new strategy, now we need funding and action.” This was the message from Stuart Loveday, President, Australian Hepatitis Council, at today’s launch of the *2<sup>nd</sup> National Hepatitis C Strategy 2005-2008* by Minister for Health and Ageing, Tony Abbott.

“While the Minister’s announcement of \$1.8m extra funding for hepatitis C surveillance is welcome, it is ‘business as usual’ as far as general funding for hep C is concerned,” he said. “This is a drop in the ocean, given the huge dimensions of the epidemic.”

“The hep C epidemic is exploding with a quarter of a million people in Australia living with this blood-borne virus, and projections of up to 836,000 in 15 years’ time,” said Mr Loveday.

The number of people diagnosed with hepatitis C has increased by nearly 90% over the period 1999-2005 since the 1<sup>st</sup> Strategy was launched – from 115,000 in 1998 to 215,000 at the end of 2004.

“So the Minister’s claim that the 1<sup>st</sup> Hepatitis C Strategy has worked is somewhat bold, given that 16,000 new infections are occurring in Australia each year – one every 30 minutes,” said Mr Loveday.

The cost to the health care system is increasing each year as more people are diagnosed, more start treatment, and more people require transplants as their liver disease progresses to cirrhosis and liver cancer.

Additional funding for education and prevention programs is essential to decrease the burden of hepatitis C on both the individual and the community as a whole.

Hepatitis C is a major public health challenge for the health care system both now and into the future and the role of prevention is paramount. The Australian Hepatitis Council will continue to work closely with the government and our partners to ensure that the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Hepatitis C Strategy is implemented in a co-ordinated and effective way.

#### **Media contacts**

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