



Australian Hepatitis Council

MEDIA RELEASE

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"Let's make it happen" – new hepatitis C strategy

"We've got the strategy, now we've got to get it happening." This was the message from Stuart Loveday, President, Australian Hepatitis Council, at today's launch of the 2nd National Hepatitis C Strategy 2005-2008 by Minister for Health and Ageing, Tony Abbott.

Stuart Loveday congratulated the Government on its commitment to a partnership approach in developing the Strategy.

"Communities affected by hep C must have a voice when Australia's response to this epidemic is being both developed and implemented," he said.

"The hep C epidemic is exploding with nearly a quarter of a million people in Australia living with the virus and projections of up to 836,000 in 15 years' time."

The number of people diagnosed with hepatitis C has increased by more than 80% over the period 1999-2005 – since the 1st Strategy was launched.

"The immediate need is for a plan to implement the many priority action areas contained in the strategy – 76 in total, so that the epidemic can be contained and those already living with hep C can access appropriate care and treatment.

"Without a concrete and achievable plan of action, this strategy will remain simply a policy document."

Stuart Loveday pointed out that the issue of resource allocation must be addressed as part of any successful action plan. The cost to the health care system is increasing each year as more people are diagnosed, more start treatment, and more people with chronic hepatitis C required ongoing care and support. The costs will continue to escalate with more people requiring transplants as their liver disease progresses to cirrhosis and liver cancer.

Additional support 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 2nd National Hepatitis C Strategy is implemented in a co-ordinated and effective way.

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