



Australian Hepatitis Council

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### Hepatitis C out of control in Australian prisons

In response to the recent calls for a needle and syringe trial in prisons, Helen Tyrrell, the Executive Officer of the Australian Hepatitis Council says, "It is imperative that Australia develops a consistent, whole of government approach to managing the health of prisoners with or at risk from hepatitis C"

The response to hepatitis C in prisons needs to accept the reality of the prison experience where blood borne viruses like hepatitis C are transmitted through sharing drug injecting equipment, tattooing and body piercing, all of which are banned but continue to occur. With up to 1 in every 2 inmates in some States having documented evidence hepatitis C infection, transmission of the virus between prisoners engaging in these activities is a major public health concern.

Ms Tyrrell says that we are not going to reduce the transmission of hepatitis C between prisoners unless prisons are able to provide:

- o Access to sterile injecting equipment
- o Access to sterile tattooing equipment
- o Access to sterile body piercing equipment
- o Access to sterile hair clippers
- o Access to education around the potential means of transmission in prison
- o Access to support including treatment for those inmates with hepatitis C

Helen Tyrrell pointed out that "Australia has largely led the world in its response to hepatitis C in the general community but it falls well behind the best practice models developed in Europe to combat the spread of hepatitis C within prisons."

Hepatitis C is a major public health challenge with significant costs to the government and tax-payer. Ms Tyrrell says the Australian Hepatitis Council "will continue to work with the government and encourage them to take some bold steps to support the extension of proven evidence-based harm minimisation strategies to the prison environment."

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