

Submission to the Access Card Consumer and Privacy Taskforce by Hepatitis Australia

Background

Hepatitis Australia is the peak community organisation representing the interests of those living with, or at risk of, hepatitis. Hepatitis C is a blood borne virus spread through blood to blood contact. Transmission may occur through contaminated blood products or procedures, sharing injecting drug equipment, tattooing or body piercing and occupational or household exposure. Hepatitis C is a serious health condition with significant social, health and economic consequences for individuals, families and the nation. In Australia 90% of new cases result from injecting drug use.

We submit the following comment on *Discussion Paper Number 2: Voluntary Medical and Emergency Information*.

Summary of submission

Information about hepatitis C status should only be housed on a volunteer basis on a password protected tier of any government issued smart card. There is no medical, social or legal reason for not leaving the decision of disclosure up to the individual living with hepatitis C. Disclosure of hepatitis C without the permission of the individual can lead to discrimination and privacy concerns

Discussion

Hepatitis Australia supports the recommendations made in the Voluntary Medical and Emergency Information Discussion Paper, specifically the recommendation that a two tier system should be used, and that Hepatitis C status should only be listed on a password protected second tier, with the password held by the individual living with hepatitis C.

We support a password protected second tier as there is no legal, medical or social reason for disclosing hepatitis C status on a smart card without the permission of the individual living with hepatitis C.

There is no legal obligation for an individual to disclose they are living with hepatitis C unless the individual is donating blood, working in health care and conducting exposure prone procedures, using certain insurance policies or if the individual is a member of the Australian Defence Force.

Further, the discussion paper correctly states that there is not a need for emergency/health personnel to know of an individual's hepatitis C status as it is expected they would be applying universal precautions to deal with blood spills and possible contamination.

There is also the concern that knowledge of hepatitis C status by health personnel frequently leads to the individual concerned being treated in an improperly discriminatory fashion and puts them at risk of having their privacy compromised.

Many people with hepatitis C fear disclosing details of their infection due to the discrimination and stigmatisation experienced by people living with hepatitis C. Deciding whether to tell others about having hepatitis C is a personal decision

and only the individual living with hepatitis C can make the choice about who, why, where and when to tell others.

For these reasons we agree that individual participation in any smart card scheme will always be voluntary and must be in the control of the cardholder, with disclosure of hepatitis C status left up to the individual living with hepatitis C.

Recommendations

Hepatitis Australia supports recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 made by the Access Card Consumer and Privacy Taskforce