

COALITION RESPONSE TO HEPATITIS AUSTRALIA

- 1. Does your party support a sensitive mass media campaign to educate the broader community about hepatitis C? Will your party commit to advocating within the new Parliament for adequate resourcing of a hepatitis C mass media campaign?**

The Coalition is proud to have produced the National Hepatitis C Strategy 2005-2008 which builds on the successes of the first Strategy and identifies three key priority action areas as having the greatest potential to reduce hepatitis C transmission. These action areas are:

- to enhance hepatitis C prevention efforts targeting those most at risk;
- to improve access to treatment so more people living with hepatitis C access the very effective treatments currently available; and
- to improve national Hepatitis C surveillance.

The Coalition Government committed \$17 million over four years for continuation of the Hepatitis C Education and Prevention Initiative in the May 2007 Budget. Efforts to reduce transmission focus on increasing awareness of the transmission risks and high risk behaviours such as sharing injecting equipment, among specific populations. Efforts to reduce the impact of infection focus on improving access to treatment, care and support for affected individuals, improving diagnostic capacity, and supporting research and surveillance.

- 2. Does your party support the expansion of hepatitis C treatment access points to improve uptake? Will your party commit to funding of clinical trials of different models of treatment for hepatitis C?**

There is no vaccine for Hepatitis C but effective treatments are available which can help people clear the virus. The Coalition approved Section 100 (Highly Specialised Drugs Program) listing for pegylated interferon under the Pharmaceutical Benefits

Scheme from 1 August 2002. Pegylated interferon represents a significant advance in treatment options for those with Hepatitis C.

Figures for 2006-2007 indicate that over \$52 million in funding has been provided for specific Hepatitis C medications comprising \$46 million for public hospital patients and \$7 million for private patients. Additionally \$1.8 million has been provided under the programme for medications prescribed for Hepatitis B or C (over \$600,000 for private patients and \$1.1 million for public patients).

3. Will your party support the development of a comprehensive National Hepatitis B Strategy and commencement of implementation by 2009? Will your party commit to the provision of adequate infrastructure within community organisations to facilitate their participation as partners in the development of the National Hepatitis B Strategy?

The Coalition established the Ministerial Advisory Committee on AIDS, Sexual Health and Hepatitis C (MACASHH) to provide advice on blood borne viruses and sexually transmitted infection (STI) strategies.

Hepatitis B has been considered by MCASSH and the Hepatitis C Subcommittee and will be considered in the context of the review of all the blood borne viruses and STIs.

4. Does your party support the provision of successfully proven harm reduction programs such as methadone and needle syringe programs? Will your party commit to advocating within the new Parliament for provision of funding incentives to the States and Territories to ensure expansion of access to needle syringe programs?

Needle and Syringe Programmes (NSPs) are funded and administered by state and territory governments. While the Coalition Government does not provide any funding directly to operators of Needle and Syringe Programs, in April 1999 the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) first introduced the Supporting Measures Relating to Needle and Syringe Programmes ('the Supporting Measures'). The aim of the Supporting Measures is to provide ongoing support to Needle and Syringe Programmes

to increase the rates of voluntary entry of injecting drug users into treatment programmes. The Coalition has allocated \$44.9 million over five years to continue the Supporting Measures until June 2008. This funding is provided directly to state and territory governments exclusively for the purposes of encouraging injecting drug users into drug rehabilitation programmes via state/territory operated NSPs.

5. Will your party advocate within the new Parliament for the implementation of the Hepatitis C Prevention, Treatment and Care: Guidelines for Australian Custodial Settings? Does your party support the expansion of harm reduction programs to custodial settings?

People in custodial settings are among those with the greatest risk of contracting Hepatitis C. The Coalition will look very closely at the new guidelines when they are released but as you mention state prisons are managed by state governments and the implementation of these guidelines is a decision for state governments. The Coalition supports initiatives in line with the National Hepatitis C Strategy that aim to reduce the rate of infection and improve awareness.

6. Will your party commit to advocating within Parliament for increased funds specifically targeting hepatitis C and hepatitis B research across all streams?

The Coalition Government funding for Hepatitis C research is directed through the national centres, which are funded at approximately \$8.3 million per annum for HIV, Hepatitis C and sexually transmissible infections research combined. The Coalition has committed to continued funding of the national research centres, at this level, to 30 June 2008.

- 7. Will your party commit to ongoing support to hepatitis community organisations for their work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities around viral hepatitis education and prevention programmes?**

Community organisations are funded through the Hepatitis C Education and Prevention Initiative which runs until 2008.

- 8. Will your party commit to endorsing May 19th as World Hepatitis Day from 2008? Will your party commit to advocating within the new Parliament to specific additional funding for raising awareness of hepatitis B and C within Australia in association with World Hepatitis Day?**

The Coalition is supportive of measures that raise awareness of Hepatitis C. The Health Minister, Tony Abbott, launched the first Hepatitis Awareness Week on the 25th May 2005. The Coalition has supported the awareness week in 2006 and again this year.