hepatitis australia

Media statement for immediate use

12 May 2021

Removing barriers to telehealth will improve access to hepatitis B treatment and hepatitis C cures

Hepatitis Australia welcomes the Australian Government's commitment to extend telehealth and remove access barriers in the 2021 Budget.

Crucially for people living with hepatitis B and hepatitis C who could benefit from telehealth consultations, the Australian Government has exempted some patient cohorts from requiring a pre-existing relationship with a doctor and to have seen them in the last 12 months. This means that patients with viral hepatitis can now access treatment via telehealth without needing to have previously or recently seen that clinician.

These changes follow on from work undertaken by national peak bodies to ensure that as many people as possible can benefit from telehealth innovations.

Hepatitis Australia supports telehealth as a positive outcome of COVID-19 adaptations and to become a permanent fixture in the Australia health care system.

"We were extremely pleased to see the extension of telehealth and removal of barriers for s100 conditions will now enable better access to treatment for people living with hepatitis B and hepatitis C", said Carrie Fowlie, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Hepatitis Australia, the national peak body on viral hepatitis.

"Hepatitis B treatment and hepatitis C cures are section 100 drugs,[1] which can only be prescribed by s100 registered doctors who have undertaken specialised training. The previous restrictions limited access to telehealth consults with a doctor the patient had seen in the last 12 months."

"This previous arrangement created barriers for people with hepatitis B and hepatitis C in accessing telehealth consultations. Because of stigma or limited numbers of s100 providers, many people have seen a separate doctor for hepatitis treatment to their usual GP. This means that 12 months or more can pass between visits to that treating doctor. We are delighted this will no longer disadvantage people with hepatitis B and hepatitis C."

"If left untreated, hepatitis B and hepatitis C can cause cirrhosis, liver failure and liver cancer. Timely intervention is essential to preventing these conditions from worsening. These telehealth changes can improve health equity, including for people living in rural and remote areas."

"Removing barriers to treatment is crucial to achieving viral hepatitis elimination by 2030 in Australia," said Ms Fowlie.

The National Hepatitis Infoline provides free, confidential support. Call 1800 437 222 to talk to someone in your State or Territory.

Media Contact: Carrie Fowlie – CEO - 0499 775 456 carrie@hepatitisaustralia.com

[1] Hepatitis C cures/direct acting antivirals are also listed as section 85 drugs, which can be prescribed by all GPs without specialised training.