



## Media Statement

6 October 2020

### **Investment in hepatitis research needs to be accompanied by National Strategy implementation funding**

Hepatitis Australia welcomes the Australian Government's commitment to diverse hepatitis research, with the 2020 Health Budget describing funding for pathogen genomics, prison-based interventions, and point-of-care testing. However we remain concerned that the 2019 Health Budget funding for hepatitis commitments is yet to hit the ground.

"Excellent science, acting with affected communities and solid implementation underpins good public health," said Carrie Fowlie, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Hepatitis Australia, the national peak body on viral hepatitis.

"Hepatitis Australia commends Australian governments for their commitment to the elimination of viral hepatitis by 2030 and, as Australia's national hepatitis organisation, we are privileged to help governments and communities achieve that goal."

"Hepatitis B and hepatitis C are the most common blood borne viruses in the world, including here in Australia. Despite some good progress Australia needs to ramp up its responses to hepatitis B and hepatitis C to meet its hepatitis elimination goals."

"Hepatitis Australia welcomed the Australian Government's announcement of an additional \$45.4 million over four years, commencing in 2019-20, to increase public health prevention and promotion activities to deliver on the goals of the five National Blood Borne Virus and Sexually Transmissible Infections Strategies."

"We are pleased that this funding from the 2019 Health Budget still stands, however we are concerned that the majority of this funding is yet to be allocated. This is particularly concerning given the falling hepatitis testing rates since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic," said Ms Fowlie.

"Pathology testing data shows that there has been a decline in tests for non-COVID conditions, and in the case of hepatitis we understand that the numbers have not yet recovered."

"Recent data from the Viral Hepatitis Mapping Project shows that Australia is no longer on track to meet the nationally agreed targets outlined in the National Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C Strategies 2018-2022."

"We urge the Australian Government to release the implementation funding under the National Blood Borne Virus and Sexually Transmissible Infections Strategies. This funding is crucial to ensure that Australia meets its 2022 targets and Australia's commitment to eliminating viral hepatitis is realised," said Ms Fowlie.

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

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