



Roundtable on Hepatitis C in Prisons

The House of Representatives Health Committee will hold a public roundtable hearing for its inquiry into hepatitis C in Australia in Canberra on 4 May 2015. The roundtable will focus on the prevention, prevalence and treatment of hepatitis C in Australia's prisons and participants will include public health advocates and union representatives.

In 2014, Australia had over 33 000 people living in custodial settings. It is estimated that up to 1 in 2 prisoners are hepatitis C positive, while 2 in 3 female prisoners are living with a chronic hepatitis C infection. Further, 33 per cent of prisoners continue injecting illicit drugs whilst in prison, 90 per cent of whom also share injecting equipment, the leading cause of transmission of the hepatitis C virus.

The Chief Executive from the Public Health Association of Australia, Mr Michael Moore, commented "...given the ongoing and well-documented disproportionate rates of Hepatitis C among people in custodial settings, PHAA continues to support the implementation of needle and syringe programs in prisons as a means of preventing the spread of Hepatitis C in the broader community".

The Community and Public Sector Union stated, "The CPSU's members in prisons occupy roles in a work environment unparalleled in terms of the risk of occupational violence compared to any other across the country.... The proposal of any needle and syringe exchange program however represents one step too far away from the protection of those in the correctional system in what our members consider is already a delicate balance".

Chair of the Committee, Mr Steve Irons MP, stated "Hepatitis C in Australian prisons is a significant public health concern due to the dynamic movement of people in and out of custody. While the Committee is cognisant of the fact that prisons are run by states and not the Commonwealth, the potentially high prevalence of hepatitis C in prisons has highlighted the need to examine the prevention, prevalence and treatment in this environment. This roundtable is an opportunity for the Committee to understand the debate between public health advocates and prison officers' unions about the most appropriate methods to tackle this issue".

Details of the hearing are as follows:

Monday, 4 May 2015 – 11.30am to 2.30pm

Committee Room 2R1, Parliament House, Canberra

11.30 am	Prevalence and prevention strategies in prisons
12.45 pm	<i>Break</i>
1.15 pm	Treatment in prisons
2.30 pm	<i>Close</i>

The hearing will be broadcast live (audio and visual) at: <http://www.aph.gov.au/live>

A detailed program and further information about the inquiry, including the terms of reference, are available at: www.aph.gov.au/hepatitisc

For media comment please contact Jonathan Martin from the office of Mr Steve Irons MP on 0439 412 855. **For all other enquiries**, please contact the committee secretariat by phone on (02) 6277 4145 or visit the committee's website: www.aph.gov.au/health.