



-New Report Presented-

The Silent Disease – Inquiry into Hepatitis C in Australia

The House of Representatives Health Committee today released its report entitled *The Silent Disease – Inquiry into Hepatitis C in Australia*.

Hepatitis C is Australia's most prevalent blood-borne virus, affecting an estimated 230 000 people. Hepatitis C can be difficult to diagnose, as its symptoms can be mild. Hepatitis C attacks the liver, and can lead to cirrhosis, liver disease, and eventually, liver cancer. Hepatitis C is also the leading cause of liver transplants in Australia.

As part of its inquiry, the Committee examined: prevalence rates, testing and treatment options, costs associated with treating the impacts of hepatitis C, prevention methods, and reducing associated stigma.

On release of the report, Mr Steve Irons MP, Committee Chair stated 'The Committee understands there is a great deal of misinformation in the community about hepatitis C, and that many people living with the disease experience stigma as a result of their diagnosis. Early testing of people potentially exposed to hepatitis C is important, as early diagnosis can change behaviours and reduce the risk of an infection being transmitted.'

'While Australia has a national strategy focused on hepatitis C, strengthening monitoring and reporting may better support the national strategy's implementation. Development of a national approach to addressing hepatitis C in prisons, may improve reporting of incidences of hepatitis C, and reduce the risk of transmission in custodial settings', Mr Irons said.

The report's key recommendations include:

- Development of and reporting against key performance indicators to determine progress made in dealing with the challenges of hepatitis C.
- Development of targeted awareness campaigns, especially in relation to stigma.
- Improved reporting of testing undertaken and exploring ways of expanding rapid point of care testing.
- Providing language-specific services for people from targeted migrant groups.
- A national approach to formulating strategies to address the high prevalence rate of hepatitis C in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.
- Exploring ways in which the patient experience in general practice could be improved.
- Development of a national standard in reporting prisoner health in custodial settings, and a national strategy for blood-borne viruses and sexually transmitted infections in prisons.
- Development of national standards in prison health delivery being raised as part of the Council of Australian Governments Health Council process.

The report is available from the Committee's website

at: http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Health/Hepatitis_C_in_Australia/Report

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