

Elimination of hepatitis C requires a comprehensive approach to care

Universal access to hepatitis C medication is not sufficient to eliminate hepatitis C as a public health threat in Australia; a comprehensive approach to management is required.

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Full publication: Scott N, Doyle J, Wilson D, Wade A, Howell J, Pedrana A, Thompson A, Hellard M. Reaching hepatitis C virus elimination targets requires health system interventions to enhance the care cascade. *International Journal of Drug Policy* 2017; 47:107–116

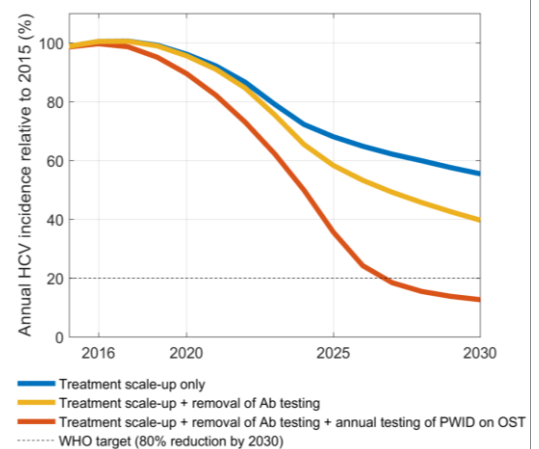
THE ISSUE

The World Health Organization (WHO) has set a target to reduce new hepatitis C infections by 80% by 2030¹. Highly-effective direct-acting antiviral treatments for hepatitis C have been available in Australia since March 2016 at low cost for all people living with the infection. However, it is unknown whether the WHO target can be met at current treatment rates.

WHAT OUR WORK FOUND

Burnet Institute researchers examined the likelihood of achieving the WHO targets based on current rates of hepatitis C testing and linkage to care. Mathematical modelling was used to estimate the potential impact of additional strategies. The results included that:

- If current rates of hepatitis C treatment uptake are continued, the WHO target for new infections would not be met in 2030.
- To reach the WHO target for new infections, a comprehensive approach to hepatitis C management is required (see boxed text). This includes additional strategies to test and engage people who inject drugs (PWID) in care.
- The comprehensive approach for hepatitis C was estimated to be cost-effective (47 Australian dollars per quality-adjusted life year gained).



A comprehensive approach to hepatitis C management (modelled in red on above graph) will meet WHO new infection targets (Ab = antibody)

A comprehensive approach to hepatitis C management:

- Ready access to effective hepatitis C treatment
- Increasing the proportion of patients being treated in primary care settings
- Simple blood tests to determine liver health
- Annual hepatitis C testing of PWID on opioid substitution therapy
- The use of rapid “point-of-care” hepatitis C tests
- Monitoring patients at high risk of significant complications (liver failure or cancer) after treatment response

CONCLUSION

Modelling shows that a comprehensive approach to hepatitis C care, including additional testing, is required to achieve the WHO elimination targets by 2030.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Additional interventions beyond treatment availability are required for Australia to reach the hepatitis C elimination targets.
- If implemented, a comprehensive approach to hepatitis C management is expected to be cost effective, lead to significant gains in population health and quality of life, and ensure Australia meets the WHO hepatitis C elimination targets.

Reference:

1. World Health Organization. *Global health sector strategy on viral hepatitis 2016-2021*.