

This World Hepatitis Day, it's your right to live free of hep C

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A new public health campaign is aiming to turn around declining hepatitis C testing and treatment rates to keep Australia on track to eliminate the disease by 2030.

The COVID-19 pandemic and related public health control measures and restrictions have played a part in the declining numbers, with many people delaying seeking routine or primary health care.

The *'It's Your Right'* campaign's goal is to eliminate hepatitis C (hep C) in people who inject drugs. Of the 120,000 Australians estimated to be living with chronic hepatitis C, people who inject drugs remain a priority community group for testing and treatment in the effort to eliminate hep C, as do prisoners, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

The campaign is using billboards, posters, street advertising, social media, and [a dedicated website](#), to raise awareness about new, simple, and effective treatments for hepatitis C among people who currently inject and encourage them to connect with their local peer organisation.

Peer networks play an important role in the campaign which is being supported by EC Australia (Eliminate Hepatitis C Australia) led by Burnet Institute, and Harm Reduction Victoria (HRVic).

"This campaign is about empowering people who inject drugs, and to raise awareness that we have a right to health care no matter our circumstances. It will build connection with services that work very closely with community to promote the benefits of the hep C cures," HRVic CEO, Sione Crawford, said.

"It's utilising the existing networks that peer-led drug user organisations have. Our members have a lived or living experience of hep C or injecting drug use, and of navigating a sometimes-confusing system. We have even more peers on the ground working with community to more smoothly access the hep C cures."

EC Australia Program Manager, Emily Adamson said people who inject drugs can often miss out on treatment through hesitancy or barriers including discrimination and stigma.

"Testing and treatment for hepatitis C in Australia has stagnated, so we need to increase awareness about the new cure for hep C which is much easier to do than the older treatments," she said.

"It's important for people in this group to understand that hep C treatment can cure you of the virus, it can rid it from your body in around 12 weeks, and everybody has the right to access this treatment across Australia."

Burnet Institute Deputy Director, Professor Margaret Hellard AM said the *'It's Your Right'* campaign has firmly taken a rights-based approach.

"Rights are about being connected to a service that won't discriminate, and that people who inject drugs know that they can be treated more than once, and while they are still using," Professor Hellard said.

"We need to think about hepatitis C as a combination of rights. We need to have trust and we need to have respect at the individual level, at the service level, and at the health system level."

The campaign has already launched in the Northern Territory, South Australia, Queensland, the ACT and Western Australia, with launches in other states from August 2022.

Through EC Australia, researchers, public health specialists, community organisations, government, and health services are working towards eliminating hepatitis C as a public health threat in Australia by 2030.

Other partners involved in rolling out the *'It's Your Right'* campaign include Hepatitis ACT, Canberra Alliance for Harm Minimisation and Advocacy (CAHMA), Hepatitis SA, Northern Territory AIDS and Hepatitis Council (NTAHC), NSW User and AIDS Organisation (NUAA), Peer Based Harm Reduction WA (PBHRWA) and Queensland Injectors Health Network (QulHN).

[World Hepatitis Day](#) (July 28) is held annually to step up national and international efforts on hepatitis, and work towards the elimination of hepatitis B and hepatitis C by 2030.

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