



**Department of Health**

Enquiries to: Robert Kemp  
Principal Public Health Officer  
Communicable Diseases  
Branch  
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Ref:

Dear Dr

I am writing to you to promote hepatitis C treatment within primary health care settings. As you may be aware, in March 2016 the Australian Government made available direct acting antiviral (DAA) medications for the treatment of chronic hepatitis C infection through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). These medications are highly effective, curing over 97 per cent of those treated and have minimal side effects. As these drugs are listed under the PBS general schedule (s85), general practitioners are able to directly prescribe hepatitis C treatment for their patients.

As shown in the attached info-graphic; in the time up to 31 December 2017, it is estimated that 11,576 (24.4 per cent) of the approximately 48,000 Queenslanders estimated to be living with hepatitis C in 2016 have been treated. For Darling Downs and West Moreton Primary Health Network, this translates to 1,212 (29.1 per cent) of the 4,160 persons living with hepatitis C residing in the catchment having been treated by the end of 2017.

This has been an excellent start toward the *Queensland Hepatitis C Action Plan 2016–2021* goal of treating 50 per cent of Queenslanders living with hepatitis C by 2021. However, the majority of patients were treated in the first six months following PBS listing of the DAAs and the number of patients treated in Queensland each month has since declined.

Improving hepatitis C treatment uptake is a priority for both the Queensland and Australian governments. Addressing the shortfall in hepatitis C treatment uptake requires a more active approach to treatment provision in primary health care settings.

On average, each general practitioner will have one or two patients who are undiagnosed and two or three patients who are diagnosed but remain untreated. Therefore, I am seeking the support of general practitioners to increase hepatitis C treatment provision by encouraging practices to undertake reviews of patient records to identify those patients living with hepatitis C and recall them for assessment, treatment or referral and to offer one-off hepatitis C testing to patients who may meet one or more of the risk criteria below:

- people who may have or be undertaking high-risk activities such as: injecting drugs, getting home piercings or backyard tattoos or other activity that involved blood to blood contact.
- people who have been in prison
- people aged 40-60 years (who may have been potentially exposed many years ago without knowing it)
- people who have had a blood transfusion before 1990
- people who have had a medical or dental procedure in the developing world
- anyone who has ever had an abnormal liver test
- immigrants from areas with a high prevalence of hepatitis C, such as South -East Asia

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- people born to a mother with hepatitis C.

Copies of hepatitis C education resources suitable for use in general practice are available for download at: <https://www.health.qld.gov.au/news-alerts/campaigns/diseases/hepatitis-c>

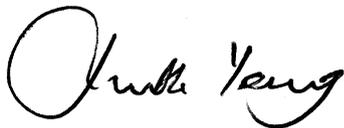
Within the Darling Downs West Moreton PHN, patients can be treated in conjunction with Kobi House (Darling Downs) or Ipswich Sexual Health and Blood Borne Virus Service (West Moreton). Both provide hepatitis C treatment services focused on supporting hepatitis C treatment in the GP surgery.

General practitioners can make referrals to these services through the normal referral portal or by contacting Peta Deppeler (Darling Downs) on 4616 6950 or Ruth Casey (West Moreton) on 3817 2428.

Complex issues and patients can be discussed with Dr John Hooper, Public Health Physician (Darling Downs) on 4616 6446 or Dr Mekala Srirajalingam, Sexual Health Physician (West Moreton) on 3817 2428.

If you require any further information in relation to this matter, please contact Robert Kemp, Principal Public Health Officer, Communicable Diseases Branch, Department of Health, on telephone 3328 9800 or via email at [robert.kemp@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:robert.kemp@health.qld.gov.au)

Yours sincerely



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11/04/2019

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