



The Hon Greg Hunt MP
Minister for Health and Aged Care

MEDIA RELEASE

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Improving diagnosis for hepatitis C patients

To help improve the treatment times of those with hepatitis C, the Morrison Government will fund a new national point-of-care testing (POCT) program that can confirm active hepatitis C infections within an hour and allow treatment to begin immediately.

The Kirby Institute at the University of NSW and the International Centre for Point-of-Care Testing at Flinders University will be provided with \$6.5 million combined to establish the program.

Being able to provide the testing and treatment all in one visit is a real game-changer for people who would normally have to wait several weeks for a test result.

This technology can test for active hepatitis C infection by taking a small amount of blood from a fingertip. This blood is analysed on site, with a result ready for the patient within an hour. If the result comes back positive, treatment can begin during that same visit.

Under the program, testing will be available nationally at 65 sites with a high prevalence of hepatitis C infection, including drug treatment clinics, needle and syringe programs, and prisons.

The program will also include the development of standard operating procedures, logistics, deployment, operator training, and external quality assurance.

At the end of 2018, an estimated 129,640 people were living with chronic hepatitis C in Australia. Hepatitis C rates have been declining in Australia since the country implemented wide access to direct acting antiviral treatments.

These treatments cure the virus in 95% of people. But many people living with hepatitis C are not aware they have it, so innovative methods are necessary to increase testing.

This major investment will increase access to hepatitis C testing, treatment, and cures across the country.

Australia is committed to achieving the global goal of reducing the burden of viral hepatitis and eliminating viral hepatitis as a major public health threat by 2030. Indeed, we could be one of the first countries in the world to reach that goal.

-ENDS-

Authorised by Greg Hunt MP, Liberal Party of Australia, Somerville, Victoria.