

Crucial tool to assist in the elimination of Chronic Hepatitis B launched

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An educational app designed to improve health literacy around the hepatitis B virus (HBV) has been translated to provide more than 70 per cent of the Northern Territory (NT) Aboriginal population access in their first language.

The Hep B Story App, a crucial tool in the work to eliminate Chronic Hepatitis B (CHB), a disease endemic in Aboriginal communities in the NT, was launched today.

The NT has an estimated CHB prevalence of three to 12 per cent, meaning the NT has the highest CHB prevalence in Australia at 1.77 per cent. Of those living with CHB, 25 per cent will die from decompensated cirrhosis (liver failure) or hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC - liver cancer). Liver cancer is the fastest growing cause of cancer death in Australia and liver disease is the third most important contributor to the gap in life expectancy between First Nations and non-Indigenous Australians.

Project lead, Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) Principal Research Fellow, Associate Professor Jane Davies says the Hep B Story App highlights the importance of in-language, community-led health initiatives and celebrates a partnership approach to health promotion.

“The app will be a key resource for trained Aboriginal Health Practitioners and Community Workers to increase knowledge of hepatitis B among patients and their communities,” A/Prof Davies said.

“Hepatitis B health literacy among patients and health care providers has repeatedly been found to be poor. Having an educational tool in an Aboriginal client’s first language is crucial in developing treatment partnerships for patients with CHB.”

The app, initially launched in 2014, was developed and launched in partnership with the Galiwin’ku community in North East Arnhem Land, providing access in English and Yolŋu matha, however upon evaluation in collaboration with community-based researchers, has now been expanded with five new languages launched in 2021 and another five due to launch in 2022.

“Our project team has worked with communities all over the NT, from Gunbalanya, Groote Eylandt, the Tiwi Islands, Alice Springs and beyond, with translators and advisors adapting the app in their languages,” A/Prof Davies said.

“This process enabled significant two-way learning and education even before the app existed.”

According to Galiwin’ku community-based researcher, Roslyn Dhurrkay, having a health literacy app in language is imperative to improving outcomes for her people.

“When Balanda tells the story, Yolŋu doesn’t understand whole story, they don’t know about hep B, don’t hear story right and get confused,” she said.

The app is now available in English, Yolŋu matha, Arrernte, Tiwi, Warlpiri, Kunwinjku and Pitjantjatjara. In 2022, the app will be launched in remaining languages, Anindilyakwa, Gurindji, Murrinh-patha, Kriol and Burarra.

The Hep B Story app is free to download from the Apple and Google Play stores and the Menzies website https://www.menzies.edu.au/page/Resources/Hep_B_Story/.

Menzies partnered with the NT Government, the NT AIDS and Hepatitis Council, The Australasian Society of HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexual Health Medicine, Miwatj Health Aboriginal Corporation, Katherine West Health Board and the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress on the project.

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Media contact:

Paul Dale, communications manager

Phone: 0439 108 754 or (08) 8946 8658 | Email: communications@menzies.edu.au

Menzies School of Health Research

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