



WA Hepatitis C Strategy 2015–2018



The goals of this strategy are aligned with the goals of the [Fourth National Hepatitis C Strategy 2014–2017 \(external site\)](#), and are:

- to reduce the transmission of, and morbidity and mortality caused by, hepatitis C
- to minimise the personal and social impact of the epidemic.

[Hepatitis C \(Healthy WA\)](#) is an important public health issue. If not treated, chronic hepatitis C infection can lead to serious liver disease, including cirrhosis, liver cancer, and in some cases, liver failure.

In 2014 there were 1,151 notifications for hepatitis C in Western Australia (WA). Of these notifications:

- 157 were newly acquired (evidence of the disease having been acquired in the 24 months prior to diagnosis)
- 994 were unspecified (infections of unknown duration).



**PREVENTION
& EDUCATION**



**TESTING &
DIAGNOSIS**



**DISEASE MANAGEMENT
& CLINICAL CARE**



**WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT**



**ENABLING
ENVIRONMENT**



**RESEARCH, EVALUATION
& SURVEILLANCE**

Strategic context

[The Auckland Statement \(external site\)](#) on viral hepatitis sets targets to:

- reduce incidence of new infections
- ensure that people with hepatitis C are diagnosed
- guarantee access to treatment for people with hepatitis C.

National strategy

In 2014 the Australian Government Department of Health launched the [Fourth National Hepatitis C Strategy 2014–2017 \(external site\)](#). This strategy provides direction for coordinated action to reduce rates of hepatitis C transmission and increase the number of people receiving treatment for hepatitis C through the following objectives:

- reducing the incidence of hepatitis C
- reducing the risk behaviours associated with the transmission of hepatitis C
- increasing access to appropriate management and care for people with chronic hepatitis C
- reducing the burden of disease attributed to chronic hepatitis C
- eliminating the negative impact of stigma, discrimination, legal, and human rights issues on people's health.

Western Australia

The WA Hepatitis C Strategy 2015–2018 aligns with the national strategy and the Auckland Statement to address the needs of people living with, and affected by, hepatitis C in WA.

The strategy also follows on from the previous WA [Hepatitis C Model of Care Implementation Plan 2010–2014 \(PDF 2.7MB\)](#) which aimed to direct the implementation of the key recommendations proposed in the [Hepatitis C Virus Model of Care \(PDF 435KB\)](#). Progress made under the previous plan includes:

- increased access to sterile needles and syringes for people who inject drugs through a number of new [needle and syringe programs \(NSPs\)](#) in WA (including needle and syringe exchange programs in metropolitan and regional areas, and needle and syringe vending machines)
- development of a [Chronic Hepatitis B and C Primary Care Pathway \(PDF 1.56MB\)](#)
- increased availability of workforce development opportunities, including online training programs
- development of a [National Hepatitis C Testing Policy \(external site\)](#).

Priority populations

Particular populations are prioritised within this WA strategy, and include:

- people living with hepatitis C
- people who inject drugs
- Aboriginal people who inject, or have injected, drugs
- people in, or who have recently exited, custodial settings
- people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who inject, or have injected, drugs.

With recent new developments in treatment for hepatitis C, and further new treatments on the horizon, there is the potential for significant progress to be made over the course of this strategy in reducing the burden of disease associated with hepatitis C.

Monitoring and evaluation

Progress against the *WA Hepatitis C Strategy 2015–2018* will be collated in the Hepatitis C Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. This framework will be updated regularly.

Other useful sources of data relating to hepatitis C include the:

- [statewide notifiable disease report for WA \(external site\)](#)
- [hepatitis C monthly report for WA \(external site\)](#)
- [quarterly and annual sexually transmitted infections and blood-borne virus epidemiology reports for WA](#)
- [National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System \(external site\)](#).

[Back to beginning](#)



WA Hepatitis C Strategy – prevention and education

Increase knowledge and awareness of hepatitis C

Increase knowledge and awareness of hepatitis C among priority populations and the wider community by:

- working in partnership with a range of stakeholders to increase awareness of hepatitis C among priority populations and the wider community
- continuing to support peer education and support services for the hepatitis C affected community
- increasing the capacity of the needle and syringe program (NSP) sector to provide hepatitis C education to people who inject drugs.

Increase access to sterile injecting equipment

Increase availability, access to, and use of, sterile injecting equipment among people who inject drugs by:

- increasing NSP service options, particularly in regional and remote areas, and for Aboriginal people who inject drugs
- increasing the range of injecting equipment available in response to drug use trends, particularly in regional areas.

[Back to beginning](#)



WA Hepatitis C Strategy – testing and diagnosis

Improve access to testing

Access to testing for people at risk of hepatitis C will be improved by increasing:

- routine and opportunistic testing as part of health checks, particularly among men, Aboriginal people at risk, young people at risk and those in custodial settings
- awareness amongst both health care workers and the affected community of the need to test for hepatitis C
- testing options available, for example through community-based and outreach services
- awareness among health professionals of the National Hepatitis C Testing Policy (external site).

Improve access to support services

Improve referral and access to appropriate support services at the time of diagnosis for people with, or at risk of, hepatitis C to initiate a pathway to care. This will be achieved by:

- promoting engagement with peer education and support for people with, or at risk of, hepatitis C
- increasing awareness among health professionals and patients of referral options following testing.

[Back to beginning](#)



WA Hepatitis C Strategy – disease management and clinical care

Improve awareness of treatment options

Awareness and knowledge among people with hepatitis C about treatment options will be improved by:

- providing opportunities for healthcare professionals to be kept up-to-date with available treatment options
- continuing to support community based organisations to inform the affected community about treatment options.

Improve access to treatment

Access to treatment for people with hepatitis C will be improved through:

- community based treatment services in metropolitan and regional areas
- increasing involvement of primary healthcare professionals in shared care for hepatitis C
- establishing an accreditation program to allow treatment initiation by approved s100 GP prescribers (pending approval of GP treatment initiation under the PBS)
- increasing involvement of other health services in the treatment and management of people with hepatitis C in the health, community, and youth workforce, for example alcohol and drug services, and Aboriginal community controlled health organisations
- supporting increased access to treatment in custodial settings
- advocating for community pharmacy dispensing of hepatitis C medications
- promoting referral pathways to tertiary hospitals for people living with hepatitis C and co-morbidities.

[Back to beginning](#)



WA Hepatitis C Strategy – workforce development

Improve workforce knowledge

Improve awareness and knowledge of prevention, testing, management, and treatment of hepatitis C in the health, community, and youth workforce by:

- making training and education available through a variety of mediums, including online, face-to-face, webinars, and videoconferences
- ensuring training is available to staff in regional and remote areas on topics including needle and syringe programs (NSP) and hepatitis C
- developing and promoting a central directory of workforce development opportunities.

[Back to beginning](#)



WA Hepatitis C Strategy – enabling environment

Promote rights and support access

Create supportive and enabling environments that promote the health and rights of those living with, or at risk of, hepatitis C. Access to hepatitis C prevention, treatment, and care services will also be supported.

This will be achieved by:

- engaging with affected communities to identify and address barriers to meeting their needs
- ensuring consumer participation at key forums
- implementing strategies that aim to reduce stigma and discrimination in healthcare settings
- providing patients and consumers with information about their rights and responsibilities
- maintaining existing partnerships, and developing new partnerships, to better meet the needs of people affected by hepatitis C
- continuing to advocate for people in custodial settings to have access to the same means of prevention as those in the community, including health hardware such as sterile injecting equipment.

[Back to beginning](#)



WA Hepatitis C Strategy – research, evaluation and surveillance

Understand disease burden

Understanding of the burden of disease attributable to hepatitis C and associated risk factors will be improved by:

- continuing to make regular epidemiological data available to inform service planning and implementation
- continuing to support and participate in relevant national research projects.

Evaluate public health response

The public health response to hepatitis C will be evaluated to assess the impact of these programs on decreasing the morbidity and mortality associated with hepatitis C.

This will be achieved through:

- building organisational competence in evaluating hepatitis C programs and activities
- building research and evaluation into the development of new programs
- sharing research and evaluation findings across the sector to inform future planning and projects

[Back to beginning](#)

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Produced by the Sexual Health and Blood-borne Virus Program
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