

# Hepatitis C timeline – a decade of development

1971 –	Stored blood samples from people who inject drugs, admitted to Fairfield Hospital, Melbourne with hepatitis, later show a majority to have already contracted HCV.	1993 Jan –	NZ Hepatitis C Support Group publishes first edition of their self titled newsletter – later to become <i>The Chronicle</i> .		<b>transmission of HCV and to minimise the personal and social impact for those already infected.</b>	1995 Nov –	Community endorsement for establishment of the Australian Hepatitis Council.	1997 Feb –	Research paper, <i>Hepatitis B and C in NSW prisons: prevalence and risk factors</i> , published in the Medical Journal of Australia (Vol166, 3 Feb 97).
1974-75	NonA NonB hepatitis emerges as a blood borne illness.	1993 Feb –	Hepatitis C Support Group incorporates as the Australian Hepatitis C Support Group.	1994 Oct –	Research paper, <i>Risk factors for hepatitis C infection among injecting drug users in Sydney</i> , published in Genitourinary Medicine (Vol70, No5).	1995 Dec –	Community lobbying overturns Commonwealth Employment Service practice of disclosing job seeker's HCV status to potential employers.	<b>1997 Mar –</b>	<b>NHMRC launches the report: <i>Strategy for the Detection and Management of Hepatitis C in Australia</i>.</b>
1977 May –	A group of Irish women contract HCV through contaminated anti-D immunoglobulin injections during 1977, 1978. Their follow up provides data for HCV natural history studies.	1993 May –	Presentation of 4,000 signature petition to NSW Health Minister calling for the NSW Government to, inter alia, initiate an anti-discrimination focussed community awareness campaign.	<b>1994 Oct –</b>	<b>Interferon monotherapy (for 6 months) funded under Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) Section100 Scheme, following Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) approval in Dec 1992 for use in Australia.</b>	1996 Mar –	7 <sup>th</sup> International Conference on Reduction of Drug Related Harm hosted in Hobart. Paper, <i>Injecting Nation</i> , calls for a shift to NIROA (non-injecting routes of administration) as a means to control HCV.	1997 Mar –	First Australasian Conference on Hepatitis C held in Sydney, NSW <i>"There is .. an underlying epidemic associated with the virus which is just as prevalent, just as virulent and just as threatening, and that is the epidemic of discrimination"</i> Chris Puplick.
1988 –	First interferon trial for NonA-NonB initiated at Westmead Hospital, NSW.	1993 Oct –	First Annual National Symposium on Hepatitis C held at St Vincent's Hospital, Melbourne <i>"Virtually all people with acute HCV infection seem to become chronically infected and .. liver disease .. develops in an average of 67% of cases"</i> M Alter (USA).	<b>1994 Oct –</b>	<b>National Interferon Database established.</b>	1996 May –	Release of <i>Drugs: turning the tide</i> , a report from the VIC Premier's Drug Advisory Council, also known as the Penington Report. Calls for, inter alia, trialling of new drugs that that may offer other options in treatment, additional to methadone.	1997 Mar –	The Age newspaper reports: <i>HEPC OUT OF CONTROL, STUDY SHOWS: Hepatitis C in Australia is spreading out of control, with 10% of drug users becoming infected every year.</i>
1988 May –	Chiron scientists report the discovery of HCV in media press conference; confirmed in <i>Science</i> , April 1989.	<b>1993 Oct –</b>	<b>Release of the joint Report on the Epidemiology, Natural History and Control of Hepatitis C by the National Health &amp; Medical Research Council and Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council. Report urges, "Comprehensive educational programs are necessary to reduce disease transmission, promote rapid, timely and accurate diagnosis, improve clinical management, and allay fears and eliminate prejudice in the general community."</b>	1994 Nov –	1 <sup>st</sup> National Meeting on Public Health Aspects of Hepatitis C, held at St Vincent's Hospital, Melb. Nick Crofts highlights the HCV transmission risks of the drug injecting environment, including injecting equipment other than needles and syringes.	1996 May –	NSW Premier Bob Carr floats the idea of NGO run injecting rooms. <i>"We'd all prefer to have people who are injecting heroin doing so in suitable surroundings, rather than in the parks or in the streets."</i>	Same month, Sydney Morning Herald newspaper reports: <i>JAILS 'A BREEDING GROUND FOR HEP C': Australian prisons are a breeding ground for hepatitis C, with half of all inmates tested having the disease.</i>	
1989 –	First Australian HCV antibody studies initiated, showing high prevalence among injecting drug users.			1995 Feb –	Inaugural meeting of the Hepatitis C Council of Queensland.	1996 Aug –	<b>National Hepatitis C Councils Education Reference Group publishes the Commonwealth sponsored report, <i>Meeting the Needs of People in Australia Living with Hepatitis C</i>.</b>	1997 April –	<i>The Hep C Handbook</i> , by Matthew Dolan (UK) becomes available in Australia.
1989 –	AusHep 1, first of several Australian interferon trials, initiated.			1995 Feb –	Research paper, <i>Spread of bloodborne viruses among Australian prison entrants</i> , published in the British Medical Journal (Vol310, 4 Feb 95).	1997 May –	First Australian HCV video, <i>"Hepatitis C, not my whole life"</i> released by Hepatitis C Council of SA.	1997 May –	<b>Commonwealth endorses PBS funded interferon for 12 months – as opposed to previous 6 month regime.</b>
1990 Feb –	Initial HCV antibody test (ELISA I) available in Australia, enabling blood bank screening to start.	1993 Oct –	First meeting of state based hepatitis C support groups, councils and foundations.	1995 Feb –	Clinical trial of CH100 Chinese herbal formulae begins at John Hunter Hospital, Newcastle, NSW.	1996 Nov –	Establishment of <i>HepCare</i> , a managed care trials initiated by the Commonwealth, based in 3 NSW Area Health Services.	1997 May –	The NSW Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues was asked to carry out an inquiry into hepatitis C in NSW. This was the first time in Australia that a parliamentary committee was asked to formally review hepatitis C.
<b>1990 Nov –</b>	<b>National Health &amp; Medical Research Council releases first formal statement on HCV.</b>	1993 Dec –	First notification of possible patient-to-patient transmission, reported in <i>NSW Public Health Bulletin</i> , Vol. 5, No 5, May 1994.	1995 Feb –	Research paper, <i>Spread of bloodborne viruses among Australian prison entrants</i> , published in the British Medical Journal (Vol. 310, Feb 95).	1996 Nov –	Community lobbying initiated, eventually successful, arguing against proposed restrictive Commonwealth changes to Disability Support Pension.	1997 June –	<b>Establishment of the Australian Hepatitis Council, the national peak body for Hepatitis C Councils.</b>
1991 June –	Second generation HCV antibody test (ELISA II) available in Australia.	1994 Jan –	Australian Gastroenterology Institute publishes the booklet, <i>Hepatitis C: Second Edition</i> .	1995 Sept –	Launch of the <i>NSW Community Policy on Prisons &amp; Bloodborne Communicable Diseases</i> , produced by a coalition of NSW community sector organisations.	<b>1996 Dec –</b>	<b>Release of <i>Partnerships in Practice</i>, a strategy framed in the context of sexual health and related communicable diseases, also known as <i>The Third National AIDS Strategy</i>.</b>	1997 June –	Medical Observer journal reports: <i>BLOOD PRODUCTS AND HEP C - A LEGAL NIGHTMARE: On 14 July a hearing will begin in the Victorian Supreme Court: NJ v Australian Red Cross. It is a test case on behalf of 30 people who are seeking compensation after allegedly contracting the incurable hepatitis C virus from blood products.</i> This case was settled out of court, as was a similar NSW test case in NSW in 1999.
1992 April –	Inaugural meeting of the Hepatitis C Support Group at Westmead Hospital, NSW.	1994 Mar –	Australian Hepatitis C Support Group reports that Commonwealth Dept of Health has rejected all three project funding applications submitted (total \$125k).	1995 Oct –	<b>AHMAC Hepatitis C Education and Prevention Reference Group publishes the policy document, <i>The Nationally Coordinated Hepatitis C Education and Prevention Approach</i>.</b>	<b>1996 Dec –</b>	<b>Expansion of the Australian National Council on AIDS to the Australian National Council on AIDS and Related Diseases.</b>		
1992 May –	Hepatitis C Support Group publishes first edition of its self titled newsletter.	1994 Sept –	Incorporation of the Hepatitis C Council of SA.	1995 Oct –	The Hon Richard Evans, states in Federal Parliament, <i>"All in all, the government has been caught napping, particularly the Minister for Human Services and Health. The government has been simply too slow to realise the magnitude of this problem and too slow to realise and respond to community needs."</i>	1997 Jan –	Start of the Commonwealth sponsored, <i>National Hepatitis C Education Program for General Practitioners</i> project, carried out by the Royal Australasian College of General Practitioners.		
1992 May –	Hepatitis C Support Group sets up Australia-wide 008 freecall phonenumber.	<b>1994 Oct –</b>	<b>The strategic policy document, <i>National Hepatitis C Action Plan</i> released by the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council; the strategy aims to minimise the</b>						
1992 July –	New Zealand Bloodbank initiates HCV antibody screening of their blood supply; a delay of over 2 years that ultimately leads to the resignation of the NZ Health Minister.								
1992 July –	Inaugural meeting of the WA Hepatitis C Support Group.								
1992 Nov –	Inaugural meeting of the NZ Hepatitis C Support Group.								
1992 Dec –	Inaugural meeting of the Victorian Hepatitis C Support Group.								

A community perspective from the Hepatitis C Council of NSW

Paul Harvey, Stuart Loveday; Hepatitis C Council of NSW

# Hepatitis C timeline – a decade of development

1997 July –	Research paper, <i>Incidence of bloodborne virus infection and risk behaviours in a cohort of injecting drug users in Victoria, 1990-1995</i> , published in the Medical Journal of Australia (Vol167, 7 July 97).	1998 May –	Research paper, <i>Health care costs of a continuing epidemic of hepatitis C virus infection among injecting drug users</i> , published in the Australian & NZ Journal of Public Health (Vol. 22, No 3).						
1997 Aug –	Research paper, <i>Systematic review of role of PCR in defining infectiousness among people infected with HCV</i> , published in the British Medical Journal (Vol 315, 9 Aug 97).	1998 July –	<b>Commonwealth announces Medicare funding for PCR Viral Detection testing in limited circumstances, following TGA approval in Oct 1995.</b>	1998 Nov –	Following a poorly worded Commonwealth press release and promotion of the clumsy term “HCV as an HIV related disease”, Channel 10 primetime news carries as its main feature, the false warning that <i>those at most risk were prisoners and young people who don't use condoms.</i>	1999 Mar –	First edition of <i>Australian Hepatitis Chronicle</i> , a resource of the Commonwealth sponsored, Australian Hepatitis Council's National Education Project.	1999 July –	NSW Government announces limited trial of drug safe injecting facilities as part of formal response to recommendations of NSW Premier's Drug Summit.
1997 Aug –	<b>Inaugural meeting of the ANCARD Hepatitis C Subcommittee.</b>	1998 Aug –	The brochure, <i>Hepatitis C: Information for all Australians</i> , released by the Commonwealth.	1998 Nov –	Sydney Morning Herald newspaper runs headline: <i>200,000 STRICKEN AS HEPATITIS C SWEEPS NATION.</i>	1999 Mar –	The audio CD, “Living with Hepatitis C”, aimed at providing support for people living in WA's isolated rural regions launched by the Hepatitis C Council of WA.	1999 July –	<b>Initial development of a First National Hepatitis C Strategy, a step that would place HCV on an equal footing with HIV/AIDS and sexual health, within an overall communicable diseases context.</b>
1997 Aug –	Development of the first low literacy HCV resource, the Streetwise Comic, <i>Hit me with your best shot</i> . Produced for a NSW Area Health Service, it is yet to be distributed.	1998 Aug –	<b>ANCARD Hepatitis C Virus Projections Working Group publishes the report, Estimates and Projections of the Hepatitis C Virus Epidemic in Australia.</b>	1998 Nov –	Same month, Weekend Australian newspaper reports: <i>“HIDDEN EPIDEMIC: Every hour of every day one Australian will contract hepatitis C, yet experts say this potentially fatal virus is still misunderstood.”</i>	1999 Mar –	Canada approves combination therapy for hepatitis C.	1999 Aug –	Second Australasian Conference on Hepatitis C in Christchurch, NZ. Paper, <i>HCV antibody prevalence among injecting drug users at selected needle and syringe exchange programs in Australia, 1995 – 1997</i> , reported a decrease in HCV prevalence among people injecting for less than 3 years, from 22% (1995) to 13% (1997).
1997 Sept –	Haemophilia Foundation Australia releases a range of hepatitis C specific booklets.	1998 Aug –	Research paper, <i>Infection with HIV and hepatitis C virus among injecting drug users in a prevention setting: retrospective cohort study</i> , published in the <i>British Medical Journal</i> (1998; Aug 15, 317:433-7).	1998 Dec –	Clinical trial of CH100 Chinese herbal preparation begins in the Northern Rivers Area Health Service, NSW, and Fremantle, WA.	1999 May –	NSW Premier's Drug Summit. Recommendations supported HCV prevention initiatives: including trials of limited drug law reform and community based injecting facilities.		
1997 Nov –	World Health Organisation reports that 3% of world population have been infected with HCV (i.e. more than 170 million people).	1998 Aug –	Sydney Morning Herald newspaper reports: <i>FEAR OF RAMPANT HEP C EPIDEMIC: The often fatal hepatitis C virus is running rampant through some sections of the community, presenting Australia with one of its most significant public health concerns of recent years.</i>	1998 Dec –	United States Food & Drug Administration approves Rebetron Combination therapy for people previously untreated.	1999 May –	European Commission approves combination therapy for hepatitis C.		
1998 –	International trials, involving Australian sites, show interferon/ribavirin combination therapy produces twice to three times better sustained response rates.	1998 Sept –	<b>Commonwealth provides limited HCV funding allocation to some States under the Public Health Outcomes Funding Agreements Incentives Projects Scheme.</b>	1999 Jan –	Following media reports of children as young as 12 or 13 injecting heroin, NSW Minister for Health moves to shut down needle & syringe program in Carolyn Lane, Redfern. This coincides with several local government councils, businesses and local community leaders moving to close similar services.	1999 May –	First National HCV Educators Forum held in Canberra as a joint project between Australian Hepatitis Council and AIVL, sponsored by the Commonwealth.		
1998 –	International trial of pegalated interferon (Pegasys) launched, involving several Australian sites. Initial results promising.	1998 Sept –	The Bulletin magazine sensationalises hepatitis C, reporting it as <i>“often fatal .. a plague unleashed by intravenous drug use with infected needles.”</i>	1999 Jan –	<b>Commonwealth Dept Health publishes the report, Hepatitis C: A Review of Australia's Response. Contains Gaining control of Hepatitis C Virus epidemic in Australia; the first Australian overview of HCV prevention.</b>	1999 June –	<b>Federal Health Minister announces \$12.4 million in new hepatitis C funding (with a strong community focus) over 4 years.</b>		
1998 Jan –	Sunday Telegraph newspaper “Doctors column” wrongly implies that transmission via airborne particles is a major HCV risk.	1998 Sept –	Launch of ARCHI, the <i>Australian Reference Centre for HCV Information</i> , providing detailed clinical information and referral for healthcare workers.	1999 Jan –	Central Sydney Area Health Service become the first NSW Area Health Service to develop and adopt a localised HCV strategy; their <i>Hepatitis C Business Plan</i> .	1999 July –	Brisbane's <i>Courier Mail</i> reports a compensation payout for an undercover policeman who claimed he had contracted HCV through contact with injecting drug users. Citing “medical evidence” the article wrongly reported that HCV was transmissible through “airborne particles” and implied that “kissing” was also a transmission route.		
1998 Feb –	<b>Federal Health Minister announces a \$1m one-off funding allocation for social and behavioural research into hepatitis C.</b>	1998 Sept –	First issue of <i>Hepatitis see</i> , the newsletter of AIVL's Hepatitis C Education Program for People Who Use Drugs Illicitly.	1999 Jan –	Using the research report, <i>Economic analysis for hepatitis C: Australia's response</i> , published on the Commonwealth Department of Health	1999 July –	Research paper, <i>Transmission of hepatitis C within Australian prisons</i> , published in the Medical Journal of Australia (Vol 171, 5 July 99).		
1998 Mar –	<b>Commonwealth Department of Health funds two national education projects, carried out by the Australian Hepatitis Council and AIVL (the Australian Intravenous League).</b>	1998 Nov –	Parliament of NSW Standing Committee on Social Issues publishes the report, <i>Hepatitis C: The Neglected Epidemic</i> , with a key conclusion: “Strategies to prevent further transmission of hepatitis C must be broad and multi-faceted. The Committee fully supports the concept of harm minimisation and considers it to be						
1998 Mar –	Federal Health Minister mistakenly reports that hepatitis C is a sexually transmitted disease.								
1998 April –	<b>PBS \$100 restriction on people who currently inject drugs lifted.</b>								
1998 May –	<i>Contact: the hepatitis C diagnosis booklet</i> , sponsored by the Commonwealth, produced by the Hepatitis C Council of QLD.								
							<p><b>Hepatitis C Council of NSW</b>            PO Box 432            DARLINGHURST NSW 1300            AUSTRALIA            Tel: 02 9332 1853 Fx: 02 9332 1730            hccnsw@hepatitisc.org.au</p>	<p><b>A fuller version of this timeline is available in Edition 26 of <i>The Hep C Review</i> – Sept 1999.</b></p> <p><b>This timeline compiled August 1999.</b></p>	