Improve hepatitis service delivery to people in regional, rural and remote NSW

In order to effectively combat viral hepatitis across NSW, all people need access to relevant health services, irrespective of where they live. For hepatitis C, this means access to prevention programs – including education, and needle & syringe programs. It also means access to effective monitoring and treatment.

The expansion of eligibility to prescribe new hepatitis C medicines, to include general practitioners in consultation with specialists, means that treatments will become increasingly accessible across NSW. However, there will continue to remain higher barriers to necessary resources, such as Fibroscan machines, and people with cirrhosis or other complex needs may continue to require treatment by specialists – which often involves travelling long distances.

The scale of the challenge in providing these services is confirmed by data showing that the five LHDs with the highest rates of hepatitis C notification adjusted for population are all in non-metropolitan NSW: Far West, Northern NSW, Mid North Coast, Western NSW and Murrumbidgee LHDs (with Hunter New England 7th, after only Sydney).

In contrast, hepatitis B is higher among people born overseas, with the five LHDs with the highest notification rates for hep B all located in metropolitan Sydney. Nevertheless, the 6th highest notification rate is for Far West LHD and for it, and other LHDs across regional, rural and remote NSW, a key challenge is in ensuring that hepatitis B testing, management and treatment is available for Aboriginal people who are disproportionately affected by hep B.

This includes ensuring Aboriginal Medical Services are resourced to respond to this demand, as well as improving the knowledge of and training for nurses and general practitioners in these areas. As with hepatitis C, some people with hepatitis B in non-metropolitan NSW will also require regular access to specialist liver services in larger centres.

Hepatitis NSW will campaign to ensure that people living with hepatitis C and hepatitis B in regional, rural and remote NSW have access to vital hepatitis prevention, management and treatment services, including support to access specialist services where necessary.

JANE SAYS
“People with viral hepatitis live in all parts of NSW but the expertise to care for us and the support facilities we need are often concentrated around big city hospitals. Providing hepatitis services and resources for rural and remote communities is vital if we are going to get on top of these viruses.”

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