



**THE HON SUSSAN LEY MP
MINISTER FOR HEALTH
MINISTER FOR AGED CARE
MINISTER FOR SPORT**

MEDIA RELEASE

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TURNBULL GOVT INVESTS OVER \$1B TO CURE HEP C

The Turnbull Government will invest more-than \$1 billion to give all Australians with Hepatitis C access to breakthrough cures that could all but eradicate the deadly and debilitating disease within a generation.

In a “watershed moment” in Australian history, Minister for Health Sussan Ley today announced Australia would become one of the first in the world to publicly subsidise these cures – currently costing patients up to \$100,000 – for the nation’s entire population of Hep C sufferers, no matter what their condition or how they contracted it.

Ms Ley said there were about 700 deaths attributable to chronic Hepatitis C infection each year, with thousands more suffering a variety of serious liver diseases and conditions, and today’s announcement was a “game changer”.

“More-than 230,000 Australians are estimated to be currently living with Hepatitis C,” Ms Ley said.

“That’s essentially one in every 100 Australians and they come from all walks of life.

“And we are currently seeing around 10,000 additional Australians diagnosed every year. As a result, deaths from primary liver cancer, for which untreated Hepatitis C is a major driver, are rising faster than for any other cancer.

“However, with this announcement there is great hope we can not only halt the spread of this deadly infectious virus, but eradicate it altogether in time.”

Ms Ley said the more-than \$1 billion investment in Hep C over the next five years followed a positive recommendation from the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC).

It comes on top of the \$620 million in new and amended medicine listings announced in Tuesday’s Mid -Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook – taking the total medicine spend in MYEFO to more-than \$1.6 billion.

Hepatitis C is an infectious blood borne virus that attacks the liver, causing its inflammation, and may lead to cirrhosis, end-stage liver disease, liver cancer and, in some cases, death. It has six different genotypes.

Ms Ley said today’s announcement would see the listing of multiple drug combinations to ensure cures for all types of Hep C were made available to the entire patient population through the PBS from March 1 2016. The medicines are: Sofosbuvir with ledipasvir (Harvoni); Sofosbuvir (Sovaldi); Daclatasvir (Daklinza); and Ribavirin (Ibavir).

“This combination of breakthrough cures has a success rate of more-than 90 per cent across the entire Hep C patient population and is faster and has fewer side effects than anything currently available,” Ms Ley said.

“Hepatitis C takes a heavy toll on patients and their families, but also the health system and the economy.

“It’s therefore important we tackle this disease head on, and that includes providing these medicines to all Australians, particularly vulnerable populations where rates of infection are high.” *(continued over page...)*

Ms Ley said the cures would be administered in line with the Australian Government's broader 4th National Hepatitis C Strategy.

Ms Ley said in the majority of cases the medicines would be taken orally, with treatment duration as short as 8 to 12 weeks.

Ms Ley said listing the combination of breakthrough medicines on the Australian Government's Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) would see Hep C patients pay just the normal PBS co-payment for these medicines.

The PBS co-payment is currently worth \$6.10 for concessional patients and \$37.70 for general patients.

Ms Ley said the PBS funding had been fully accounted for as part of Tuesday's MYEFO, but was not announced at the time as confidential pricing negotiations with medicine suppliers were still being finalised.

"The Turnbull Government is committed to listing medicines recommended by the PBAC without fear or favour, unlike Labor, who tried to halt listing new drug recommendations until it returned budget to surplus," Ms Ley said.

"As such, the Coalition has now approved about 800 new and amended listings to the PBS since coming to office – more-than double the 331 new listings in Labor's final term.

"Every dollar spent on inefficiency in the health system is a dollar we cannot invest in new breakthrough cures like this one."

Ms Ley said like access to all PBS medicines, funding was demand driven and the Government would account for any potential variations in spending accordingly.

All PBS listings are subject to final arrangements being formalised with the suppliers of the medicines.

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