

IMPLEMENTING THE HEPATITIS C CURE: THE PUBLIC HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

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Background: Direct acting antivirals (DAAs) were funded by the Australian Government for the treatment of all people with hepatitis C from the 1 March 2016. The Cure Study investigated how service providers understood 'cure,' and the potential impact of DAAs for future health delivery models, policy, and approaches to education and prevention among service providers.

Methods: Semi-structured interviews were conducted in 2015 with 22 key stakeholders working in government, non-government and clinical sectors.

Results: While the assumed revolutionary nature of DAAs was acknowledged, it was also recognised that the full potential of new treatments would depend on the development of a systematic response. DAAs were seen to have the capacity to increase treatment access to all people with hepatitis C, in particular a positive impact for people from marginalised communities. It was noted that DAAs would have a long term benefit in improving access to health services to people through reducing stigma and discrimination. There were concerns about treatment efficacy in the "real world" from community sector, general practice and clinical specialists, and it was recognised that for many people the provision and achievement of a cure occurred within a complex health situation with multiple comorbidities.

Conclusion:

The public health implications of the hepatitis C cure are significant but not uncomplicated. The cure provides the potential for eliminating hepatitis C as a public health concern in Australia by reducing the pool of the infection and thereby reducing hepatitis C transmission. The potential of DAAs will be limited by the lack of a systematic implementation plan.