

- collaboration with the AHMAC National Mental Health Working Group to develop an action plan for promoting mental health and preventing illness.
- creation of the Joint Advisory Group on General Practice and Population Health.

As new public health issues emerge, the Partnership Group, through its work program, can draw on specialist knowledge of national groups, other organisations and individuals, including the National Health and Medical Research Council, and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

While the NPHP is an alliance of governments, it also places great emphasis on developing and participating in other partnerships to foster collaboration in national public health. Other providers of public health, such as local government, public health research and education programs, and relevant agencies from States/Territories and the Commonwealth are also involved in work program activities. ☒

To find out more information about the NPHP contact Darryl Kosch at the secretariat by telephone: (03) 9637 5512; facsimile: (03) 9637 5510; email: [nphp@dhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:nphp@dhs.vic.gov.au); or by visiting the NPHP Web site at [www.dhs.vic.gov.au/nphp](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/nphp).

#### **Progress through Partnerships: Highlights of Public Health Activities in Australia**

The National Public Health Partnership has released the first of its annual reports *Progress through Partnerships: Highlights of Public Health Activities in Australia*. The report provides an understanding of the range of public health activities undertaken in Australia during 1998–99. It includes a summary of NPHP activities during the year, information on each of the national public health strategies, and contributions from all jurisdictions on public health achievements for the previous twelve months.

The annual report will be a useful resource for all those working in public health nationally, as well as providing those outside the sector with an understanding of the nature of Australia's public health effort. The report is available on the NPHP Web site or by telephoning the NPHP secretariat.

## **NSW HEALTH HEPATITIS C PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN**

### ***Brent Mackie***

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The *NSW Health Hepatitis C Public Awareness Campaign* is a new campaign targeting Hepatitis C (HCV) conducted by the NSW Department of Health in partnership with a range of government and non-government organisations. This article describes the campaign, including its background and development.

The campaign, which will run during March and April 2000, will target the complex issues of increasing awareness of HCV, and will include a statewide television advertising campaign aimed at reducing misinformation and creating an environment supportive of HCV prevention programs using social marketing techniques. It is hoped that the campaign will also encourage people

concerned about HCV to seek advice and, where appropriate, testing from their local General Practitioner.

### **BACKGROUND**

It is estimated that there are approximately 200,000 people in Australia infected with HCV. The rate of new infections is estimated to be 11,000 people annually,<sup>1</sup> with NSW accounting for over 40 per cent of all HCV cases, in terms of both prevalence and incidence.<sup>2</sup>

Prevention of HCV infection to date has concentrated on the development of health education programs targeting high-risk populations, and measures such as needle and syringe programs. No previous HCV information and education campaign in the mass media has targeted the general community in Australia. There are, however, a number of reasons why a mass media campaign would be an effective prevention and education measure. These

reasons were highlighted by the NSW Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues Inquiry into Hepatitis C (1998),<sup>3</sup> and the recent Commonwealth Government review of Australia's response to HCV (1999),<sup>4</sup> and include:

- the continuing high incidence rate for HCV possibly suggests that education and prevention programs may not have been sufficiently effective. A campaign targeting the general NSW community could substantially enhance the effectiveness of existing education and prevention programs;
- HCV may pose a greater risk to the general community than is currently realised because of poor infection control practices in skin-penetration businesses in non-health care settings;
- many people potentially infected with HCV may be unaware that they are chronically infected with the disease, that they are potentially infectious to other people and that they may benefit from the recent advance in new combination treatments for hepatitis. A general community awareness and education campaign could provide tangible health benefits to these people.
- there is a need to reduce both community concerns about HCV and the potential discrimination faced by people living with HCV.

#### **DEVELOPMENT OF THE CAMPAIGN**

In March 1999 the NSW Department of Health established a campaign steering group, comprising representatives from: NSW Health Hepatitis Advisory Committee, NSW Department of Health, Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, relevant non-government organisations, researchers, and general practitioners. This group has overseen the development and implementation of the campaign.

A consultation process involving a broad range of key stakeholders for the campaign was conducted in April and May 1999. The process included focus groups with people with HCV in both rural and urban NSW as well as telephone interviews with a range of key informants including: general practitioners, researchers, experts on injecting drug use issues, community based organisations, and people living with HCV. The information collected was used to develop an overall communication strategy and key messages for the campaign. These messages are summarised below:

##### **To the general community**

That HCV is a widespread infectious disease that can cause serious health problems. There is major risk of infection

through sharing injecting equipment, and through tattooing and body piecing with unsterile equipment. Transmission, symptoms, effects and the treatments for HCV are different to those of Hepatitis A and B. Information and support is available.

##### **To people with hepatitis C**

That information, treatment and support is available.

##### **To people with hepatitis C who are from a non-English speaking background:**

That HCV is a widespread infectious disease that can cause serious health problems. There is a major risk of infection through sharing injecting equipment, through tattooing and body piercing with unsterile equipment, and through medical procedures carried out with unsterile equipment in some overseas countries. Information and support are available.

##### **To Health Professionals**

That your attitude towards people with HCV can make a difference.

The NSW Department of Health appointed an advertising agency in January 2000 to develop the campaign products. The agency has developed a broad range of campaign materials to be launched in late March 2000.

#### **EDUCATION COMPONENTS**

*The NSW Health Hepatitis C Public Awareness Campaign* will employ a range of educational components. These will include:

- statewide television advertising, broadly based on the key messages of the campaign which will run from late March 2000 until the end of April 2000;
- print resources, including posters and pamphlets available from Area Health Services and other relevant health organisations;
- a telephone contact helpline, which will be available throughout the period of the campaign providing information and referrals relating to HCV;
- local Area Health Service activities will include, local campaign launches, information for general practitioners, needle and syringe programs;
- information mailout to General Practitioners.

The NSW Department of Health has also been working with a range of relevant government and non-government organisations including: the Hepatitis C Council of NSW, the NSW Users and AIDS Association, CEIDA, and the Multi-Cultural HIV/AIDS Project in developing a range of additional support services to deal with the effects of the campaign. These include materials targeting specific ethnic groups.

## REFERENCES

1. Australian National Council on AIDS and Related Diseases Hepatitis C Sub-committee, Hepatitis C Virus Projections Working Group. *Estimates and Projections of the Hepatitis C Virus Epidemic in Australia*. Sydney: National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research, 1998. p.11.
2. National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research and NSW Health Dept. *Estimates and Projections of the Hepatitis C Virus Epidemic in NSW*. Unpublished report, 1999. p.1.
3. Lowe, D, Cotton, R. *Hepatitis C: a review of Australia's response*. Canberra: Commonwealth Dept of Health and Aged Care, 1999.

4. Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues. *Hepatitis C: the Neglected Epidemic*. Sydney: NSW Parliament, 1998. ☞

Further information about the *NSW Health Hepatitis C Public Awareness Campaign* can be obtained from Brent Mackie, AIDS/Infectious Diseases Branch, NSW Department of Health, Locked Bag 961, North Sydney NSW 2059. Telephone: (02) 9391 9247. Email: [bmack@doh.health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:bmack@doh.health.nsw.gov.au).

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### DEAR EDITOR

The *NSW Public Health Bulletin* has helped to bring together a group of researchers to investigate the links between cardiovascular disease and periodontal disease. Staff at the Royal North Shore Hospital and the United Dental Hospital are joining forces in the Pericar Study to study the effect of periodontal treatment on haemostatic risk factors for cardiovascular disease in patients with advanced periodontal disease.

The Pericar Study was developed as a direct result of the recent publication of the four-part oral health series in the *Bulletin* during 1999. The papers in the series successfully promoted a greater awareness of oral health issues in the wider health community and facilitated interaction and discussion between health professionals.

We thank the *Bulletin* for providing the forum that resulted in this exciting research opportunity with its implications for health care.

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#### **Barbara Anne Taylor**

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### ERRATUM

In the January–February issue of the *NSW Public Health Bulletin* (Volume 11, Numbers 1–2, page 13) the contact list for Women's Health Coordinators in the Area Health Services had an incorrect table heading. The heading 'Injury Program Manager' should have read 'Women's Health Coordinator'. The editor apologises for this error.