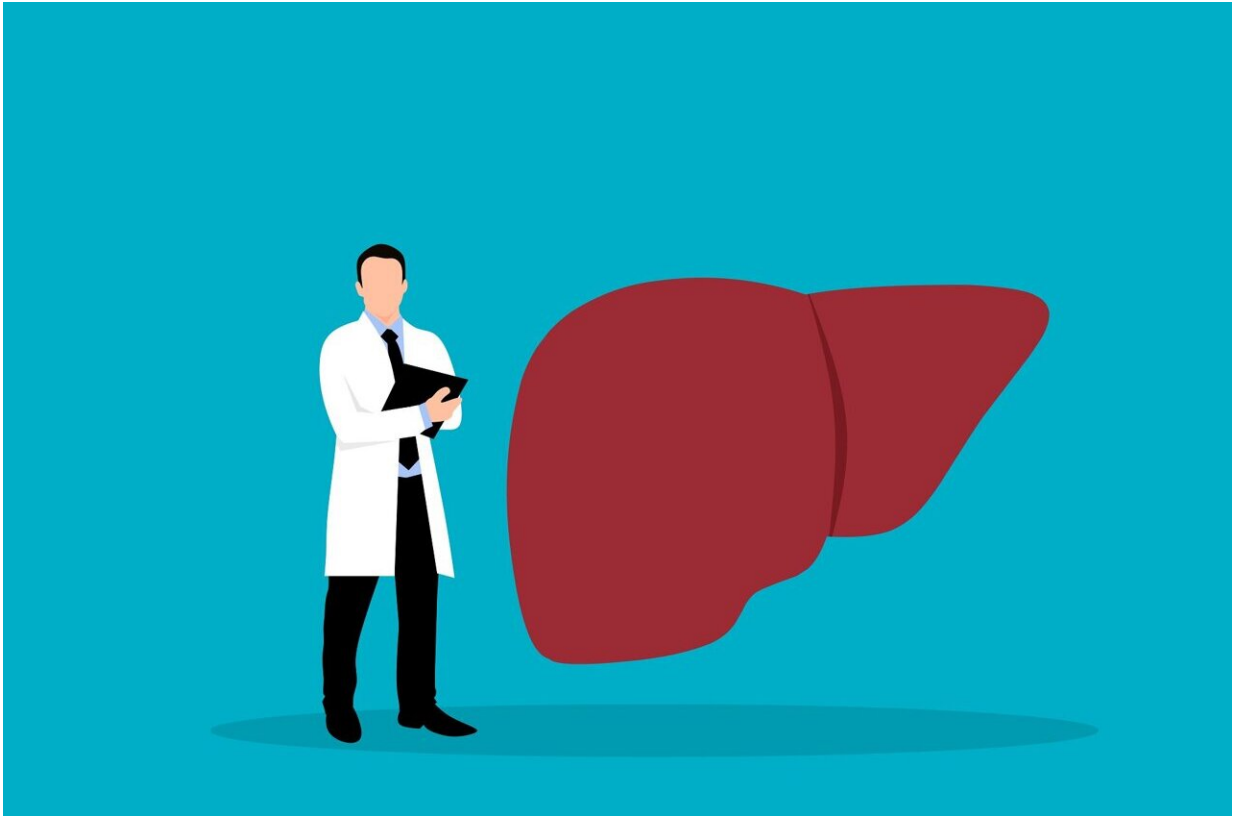


Barriers to uptake of hepatitis C medication

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La Trobe University researchers have found that multiple barriers continue to prevent some people from accessing life-saving new hepatitis C treatment, including experiences of stigma within the health care system.

The research has informed a website being launched today at the Australasian Viral Hepatitis Conference in Brisbane, to increase knowledge, reduce stigma and improve treatment uptake.

Research fellow, La Trobe University Dr. Adrian Farrugia, said the research revealed why—despite new hepatitis C treatment being a vast improvement on previous medications and subsidized on the [pharmaceutical benefits scheme](#)—tens of thousands of Australians are still not accessing it.

"Many people are keen to get treatment for their hepatitis C, but issues such as previous experiences of stigma within the health care system, insecure housing and struggles with [mental health](#) are preventing them from doing so," Dr. Farrugia said.

"Alongside the need to juggle many other pressing concerns, some people have little knowledge of the new treatment and aren't sure whether they are different from past medications that caused serious side effects and had low success rates."

Dr. Farrugia said while uptake of the new hepatitis C treatment was initially strong in Australia, it has subsequently plateaued and even declined, putting the former Australian Government's goal to eliminate hepatitis C by 2030 in jeopardy.

"According to the Kirby Institute, about 90,000 Australians have been treated with the new hepatitis C medication, but this is only about half of all the people with the disease in Australia," Dr. Farrugia said.

"This new online resource uses people's own words to counter misconceptions about hepatitis C, and inform people affected by it that a high-quality treatment option is now available."

Hepatitis C is a blood-borne disease caused by a virus that affects the liver. Over time it can cause [liver damage](#) and, if left undetected, can lead to the need for a [liver transplant](#).

While previous hepatitis C treatments were notoriously arduous, caused [serious side effects](#) and had low success rates, new medications known as direct-acting antiviral treatments are very successful and tolerable.

Dr. Farrugia conducted the project to investigate why the new hepatitis C treatment is not being accessed as much as it could, including interviewing 50 people affected by hepatitis C living in Victoria and New South Wales.

The resulting website includes stories of people who have and haven't been treated for hepatitis C—including "Julia," a women in her early 40s who was cured of hepatitis C in 2017, and who told researchers: "The treatment itself was simple. I just loved the idea of actually saying goodbye... [to the disease]."

More information: Vital voices: Personal stories of treatment for hepatitis C. www.vitalvoicesonhepc.org/

Provided by La Trobe University

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