

# Community leadership delivering innovation in elimination: Australia's National Hepatitis C Finding 50,000 Project

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## Background

Australia has committed to eliminating hepatitis C as a public health concern by 2030. Whilst notable progress has been made in some areas of the national response, other areas have stalled. For example, the availability of subsidised direct-acting antiviral cures in 2016 saw initial high uptake, however, this has not been sustained.

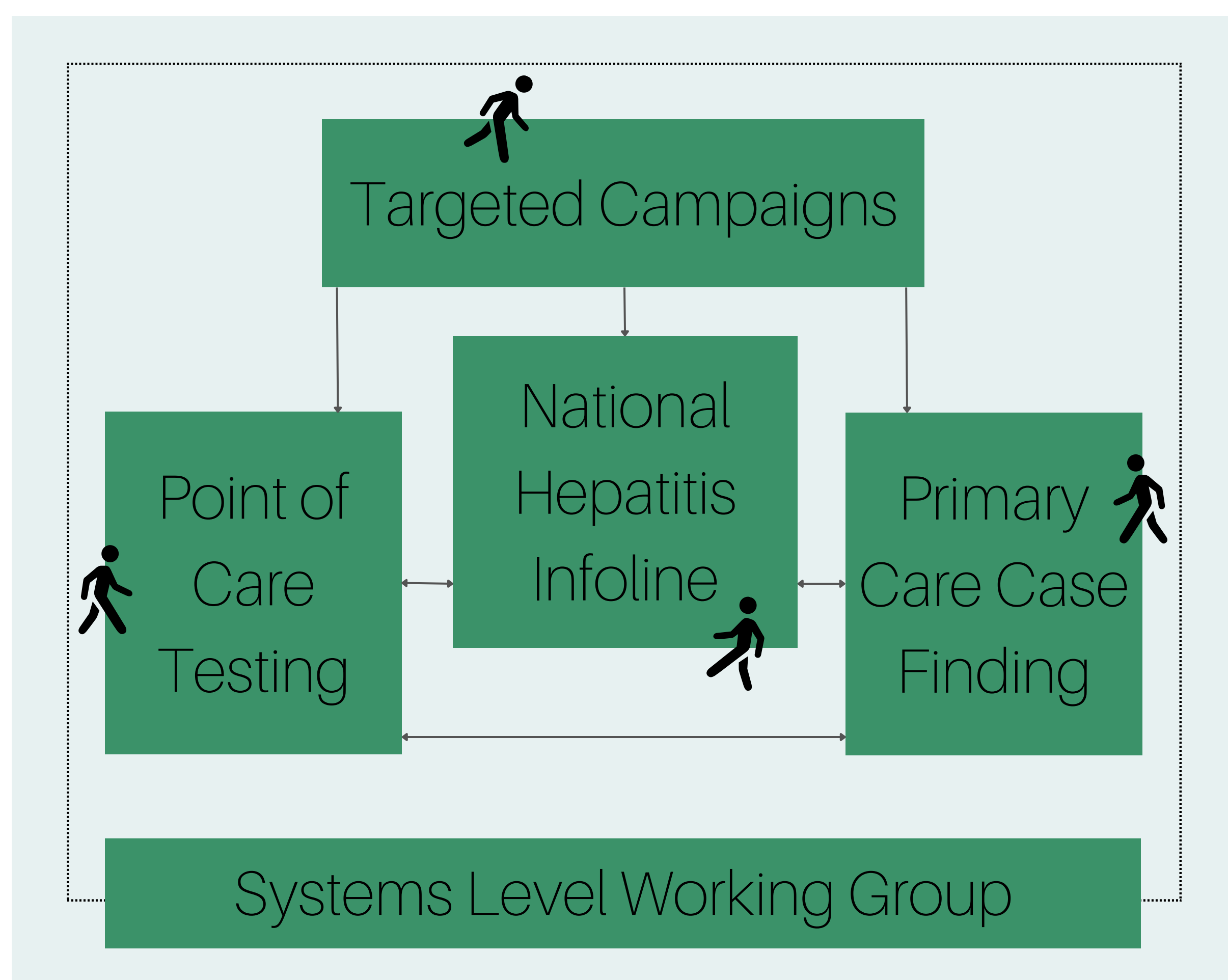
The changing shape of the epidemic and the unmet need within affected communities demands change to better engage people unreached by business-as-usual approaches. This includes moving away from siloed activities within the national response. Instead, we must look to models to where multiple areas of intervention work in tandem and leverage and innovate existing networks, capacity and infrastructure - especially that of the community - to drive effective, equitable, person-centred responses which leave no-one behind.

In 2020 the community, researchers, clinicians and government partnered to ramp-up activity. Hepatitis Australia, as the national peak that leads the national community response to viral hepatitis, coordinated the establishment of the National Hepatitis C Finding 50,000 Project (the Project) with support from the Australian Health Minister and Australian Government Department of Health.

## Model of Intervention

The Project is innovative, cross-sectoral and designed to find, test and treat 50,000 people with hepatitis C across geographically and demographically dispersed communities. Working with multiple partners, the Project drives progress through five pillars of activity:

- National hepatitis C public education campaigns
- National program to scale up hepatitis C point of care testing
- Expanded hepatitis activity in primary care including case finding
- National Hepatitis C Infoline enhancement
- Hepatitis C systems working group and project coordination and evaluation.



This diagram shows the inter-relationships between the project pillars. A person may enter anywhere and may have multiple touch points, with the end-goal of being cured of hepatitis C and preventing further infections. The working group provides support and coordination to the other pillars.

## Effectiveness

By design, each of the Project pillars are inter-related, mutually reinforcing and concurrently delivered. This enables their reach to be amplified, for messages to be reinforced and for engagement to be increased.

For example, in a single region an individual could be engaged by a campaign activity designed to raise their awareness of hepatitis C and availability of cure, motivating their subsequent link to one or more of the other project pillars including, a point of care test, support from the National Hepatitis Infoline or a GP who has undergone hepatitis C practice enhancement.

There are major barriers in the health system for hepatitis C-affected communities in accessing medicines, testing, diagnosis, treatment and care. These include stigma, discrimination, racism, legal and regulatory barriers, human rights issues, misconceptions, language and cost barriers, and concerns about confidentiality. Community partnership is an essential component of the project, helping to overcome many of these barriers.

Significant achievements have been made by this national project to date. The integrated nature of the response has worked to increase uptake in testing, treatment, awareness and engagement by various communities affected by hepatitis C. A snapshot of what the program is delivering on includes:

- National campaigns co-designed with community, which target specific geographic areas and are designed to reach specific priority populations.
- A national point of care testing program which is rapidly expanding to test and treat priority populations in the settings that the mainstream health system does not effectively service.
- Expanding primary care case finding capacity.
- A national community-based infoline service which is available to anyone, anywhere in Australia, providing localised support including systems navigation, supportive brief interventions, peer support, referral and linkage, health care workforce support and individual advocacy. It has also established the first national community hepatitis service delivery dataset.
- A systems level working group supporting project coordination.

## Conclusion and next steps

The Project has worked to expand and strengthen a national network of partnerships across community, research, clinicians and governments which has increased momentum and activity in the national response to hepatitis C. The material, relational, and resourcing capacity that this project has built forms a key foundation for scalable, intensified activity that is critical to ensuring people and communities can access testing, treatment, care and ongoing support that is appropriate, equitable and effective.

Australia is at a critical moment in its 2030 elimination journey. The Project is a model of intervention that recognises the interconnectedness and interdependence of different activities, partners and resources across the national response. The Project demonstrates that to achieve our 2030 elimination goals and leave no-one behind, collective effort and mobilisation of multiple inputs and activities is required. No single intervention can achieve it alone.

The Project should serve as a template for how we coordinate, resource and implement the national response to 2030.

Special thanks are given to project partners: Hepatitis Australia, AIVL, NACCHO, Australian Department of Health and Aged Care, Kirby Institute, ASHM, Burnet Institute.

National Hepatitis Infoline: 1800 437 222

Hepatitis Australia, incorporated in 1997, is the peak community organisation to progress national action on issues of importance to people affected by hepatitis B and hepatitis C. Our mission is to provide leadership and advocacy on viral hepatitis and support partnerships for action to ensure the needs of Australians affected by, or at risk of viral hepatitis, are met. Our members are the eight state and territory hepatitis community organisations. Our vision is to see an end to viral hepatitis in Australia.

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