



Australia's failure to implement prison NSP undermines the elimination of hepatitis C nationally, is costly and harmful in many ways, and inarguably breaches important international obligations and national commitments.

## What we said we would do.

### United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners

**Rule 1:** *All prisoners shall be treated with the respect due to their inherent dignity and value as human beings. No prisoner shall be subjected to, and all prisoners shall be protected from, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, for which no circumstances whatsoever may be invoked as a justification.*<sup>(1)</sup>

**Rule 24:** *Prisoners should enjoy the same standards of health care that are available in the community.*<sup>(2)</sup>

### Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT)

*Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment are prohibited and constitute serious violations of human rights.*<sup>(3)</sup>

### Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right of Everyone to the Enjoyment of the Highest Attainable Standard of Physical and Mental Health

*The obligation to respect the right to health includes providing persons deprived of their liberty with the necessary medical care and appropriate regular monitoring of their health and to refrain from denying or limiting their equal access to preventive, curative and palliative health-care services.*<sup>(4)</sup>

### National Hepatitis C Strategy 2023-2030 (Consultation Draft)

*Implement Needle and Syringe Programs to ensure regulated access to sterile injecting equipment in corrections settings and other places of held detention.*<sup>(5)</sup>

### Guiding Principles for Corrections in Australia (4.1.7)

*Public health is protected through measures that reduce the risk, and impact of illness or pandemic.*<sup>(6)</sup>

### Health Minister Mark Butler MP. World Hepatitis Day 2024 Parliamentary Event.

*In partnership with affected communities, national peak bodies, peer and community organisations and the clinical multidisciplinary workforce, we are examining how to reduce the transmission of hepatitis C in the prison system. We are determined to explore new ways in which we can make a difference in those settings.*<sup>(7)</sup>

## How we're going with that.

### 2023 National Data Report: Needle Syringe Program National Minimum Data Collection

In 2022/23 in the community some 50.8 million needles and syringes were distributed nationally (at an average of 698 sterile units per person who injects drugs).<sup>(8)</sup>

### Consensus Statement on the Management of Hepatitis C in Australia's Prisons May 2022

*Despite the prevailing equivalence of care principle for people in prison, and specific recommendations related to prison NSP in the National Hepatitis C Strategy 2018-2022 as well as the BBV strategies of South Australia and Western Australia, to date no Australian jurisdiction has trialled a regulated NSP in a correctional setting.*<sup>(9)</sup>

### Consensus Statement: Strengthening Injecting-Related Harm Reduction in Prisons

*Where people in prisons do not have access to needle and syringe programs, sharing of injecting equipment between people who inject drugs is common. It can also lead to the creation of homemade injecting equipment using unsterile items found in prison.*<sup>(10)</sup>

*Due to these factors, people in prison experience much higher rates of blood-borne viruses, including hepatitis C and HIV, than the general population. Lack of access to sterile and new injecting equipment also puts people at risk of highly complex injecting-related injuries and disease, such as septicaemia, vascular damage and thrombophlebitis.*<sup>(11)</sup>

*Prisons are high-risk environments for injecting-related harms, such as hepatitis C, due to a lack of access to harm reduction programs, including the provision of new and sterile injecting equipment.*<sup>(12)</sup>

### Merone et al. 2022. A complex increase in hepatitis C virus in a correctional facility: bumps in the road. ANZJPH

In sixteen months following Lotus Glen prison claiming micro-elimination of HCV (the first prison to do so) 250 new and re-infected cases of HCV (all in-prison transmissions) were notified.<sup>(13)</sup>

### Holland C. 2024. Outbreak of Burkholderia cepacia complex infections in Correctional Centres in Queensland. SiREN Conference

Novel outbreak (74 cases) of an environmental organism, naturally resistant to disinfectants and antimicrobials, causing invasive infections in people who inject drugs across QLD prisons. Infections associated with significant morbidity and cost (~\$1.4M to June 2022, for first 43 patients).

Subscribe here to engage with Hepatitis Australia on future work relating to implementing needle and syringe programs in Australian prisons.



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- [13. https://doi.org/10.1111/1753-6405.13238](https://doi.org/10.1111/1753-6405.13238)