

Global Unification for World Hepatitis Day: An effective strategy for Australian action and engagement

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Background/Approach: 354 million people live with viral hepatitis. Every 30 seconds, someone dies from a viral hepatitis related illness. Despite this extraordinary burden, viral hepatitis has been historically neglected in policy, funding, advocacy and action.

Global public health days are key opportunities for political advocacy and to centre the public's attention on a focused public health issue. World Hepatitis Day (WHD), held on 28 July, is an international annual day observed by the United Nations and one of the World Health Organization's nine officially mandated global public health days.

Analysis/Argument: Historically different themes have been used by different actors on WHD which has diluted messages, reduced impact and created challenges for stakeholder engagement in Australia.

Politicians, bureaucrats and other stakeholders had to decide which messages to engage with, which added complexity and created barriers.

The lack of national funding for WHD has also meant coordination and engagement with new stakeholders has not been realised.

Outcome/Results: Hepatitis Australia negotiated an initial small investment to coordinate WHD in Australia.

On WHD 2021, for the first time, the World Health Organization, World Hepatitis Alliance, and Hepatitis Australia unified under a single theme: "Hepatitis Can't Wait!"

Australian political actors were mobilised to make public statements including the first ever WHD Message from the Australian Minister for Health.

Global and national coordination worked in tandem, providing centralised places to access information, data and messaging.

New stakeholders made public statements, including the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Cancer Australia and Australian Breastfeeding Association.

Conclusions/Applications: Consistent messaging and coordination are part of effective communication practice. Promoting consistent messaging from channels builds credibility, trust, impact and engagement.

WHD should be funded by Australian Governments to a sufficient level to achieve public awareness, impact and national conversation.

Hepatitis Australia, as the national peak, has a critical role to play in enabling and supporting WHD in Australia.

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