

# ACTION UPDATE

## Update 6: 'Hepatitis C'

### Groundswell's Action Updates

Groundswell's Peer Advocates support homeless people to attend over 1,400 health appointments a year. Each month our **Action Updates** highlight a topic which homeless people have told us is important and offers practical advice around the issue. The guidance and quotes are based on what our Peer Advocates see first hand when working with homeless people to improve health.



### Key facts on Hepatitis C

- Hep-C is a **virus passed on through blood contact**. The most common way to catch it is through **sharing injecting equipment**.
- Most people with Hep-C don't know they have it so get a test done!
- It can lead to **liver damage**.
- **IT CAN BE CURED** Treatments are improving all the time. New drugs are taken as pills, have less side effects and a better results.

### Hep C- Groundswell's Experience

Groundswell works with the Hep-C Trust and the NHS to support people who are homeless to deal with Hep-C. Last year Groundswell peer advocates supported people to attend 93 appointments for treatment. Some of our advocates have suffered from Hep-C too, have been through the treatment successfully and made full recoveries.

*"I support people going to Hep C appointments and help them understand what its all about. The last guy I worked with, who completed his treatment, has improved his lifestyle. He's happier and feeling healthy."*

*"Speak to your GP and get a test. Then always attend the follow up appointments you are entitled to."*

*"I think its one of the most amazing treatments I've worked with. People can turn their lives around."*

### Groundswell

Groundswell exists to enable homeless and vulnerable people to take more control of their lives, have a greater influence on services and to play a full role in our community.

### Homeless Health Peer Advocacy

Groundswell works to improve the health of homeless people. Peer Advocates, who have been homeless themselves, can go with you to physical health appointments to help you to get the best service from the NHS. Practically we can offer you:

- Help to make health appointments
- Go with you to your health appointments
- Pay for your travel fares if needed.

Find out more at: [www.groundswell.org.uk](http://www.groundswell.org.uk)  
Call our office on: 03000 039 600.  
Email us at: [info@groundswell.org.uk](mailto:info@groundswell.org.uk)



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# ACTION UPDATE!

## Update 6: Hepatitis C

Hep-C is worryingly common among people who have been homeless and a lot of people don't know that they've got it. But the treatments are getting better all the time so if you think you might be at risk get yourself tested.

*"Take it from me with the new treatment, if you are eligible for it, you will have no real issues with side effects."*

### What is Hepatitis-C?

- Often called **Hep-C** for short, it's a virus which **can damage your liver**.

### How do you catch or pass on Hep-C?

- It's caught through **blood to blood contact**.
- The most common way to catch Hep-C do it by sharing injecting equipment, it could be any part of the works not just the needle. **About half of the people who have ever injected drugs have Hep-C** but most don't know that they have it. **Safer injecting practices are key to avoiding Hep-C**.
- Other common ways of catching it include sharing razors, crack pipes, notes used to snort drugs **or anything else that might have got blood on it, even if it's a tiny amount that you can't see**.

### What does Hep-C do to you?

- **Lots of people don't realise they have Hep-C because there often aren't a lot of symptoms early on**. Some people feel like a bit like they've got flu soon after catching the virus, others don't notice anything for years.
- **A common Hep-C sign is a tired "foggy brain" feeling**.
- As Hep C develops **you may get liver damage called cirrhosis** but this often happens many years after you first catch it. Your liver swells, scars over and eventually starts to fail. If this is happening you might notice losing or gaining weight, bruising easily, itchy skin and light or dark stools. **As it gets worse you may notice that your skin and eyes go yellow**, a swollen and painful abdomen and vomiting blood.
- **Alcohol also damages your liver so it can make the effects of Hep-C much worse**.

*"I was diagnosed in 1988. I was living a really chaotic lifestyle. I attempted the interferon treatment around 2000. That still had the main side effects. Recently I was put on the new "wonder drug". One month in it was "no virus detected", and now 8 months later its still "no virus detected". So my big thing is to advocate and help people to get in now. If you're Hep-C positive and your eligible for treatment with the new drugs get in now. Get the treatment done and dusted because the earlier you get the treatment the better the outcome. If you had seen me two years ago you'd see a very different person."*

### What should you do if you think you might have Hep-C or be at risk?

- If you think you might be at risk of Hep-C **get a test ASAP**. It's better to know and seek treatment earlier. GPs, sexual health clinics, drug support projects and some pharmacies offer tests.
- If you know you have Hep-C it is important that you get a scan of your liver to see if there are any signs of liver damage.

### What's the treatment for Hep-C?

- **Hep-C can be cured!!!!** There are lots of different treatments and they are improving very fast. Older treatments involve injecting yourself and can have some difficult side effects. **Newer treatments are taken as pills. They are much more effective and have less side effects**.
- If you are diagnosed you will normally be referred to a specialist who can advise on treatment options. It's also a good idea to look into treatment for yourself so you can make sure you get what's best for you.
- **Doctors will be looking for you to be organized about your treatment. Having someone to help you getting to appointments can make a big difference**.

**Check out the Hep-C Trust at: [hepctrust.org.uk](http://hepctrust.org.uk) or call their Help Line on 0845 223 4424.**



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