

Executive Summary

Viral hepatitis remains a significant public health issues locally and globally. In 2022, viral hepatitis caused an estimated 1.3 million deaths worldwide, while the number of people living with hepatitis B (HBV) and C virus (HCV) reached 254 million and 50 million respectively. As derived from the results of Population Health Survey 2020-22 conducted by the Department of Health, the prevalence of HBV and HCV infection in the general population in Hong Kong was 5.6% and 0.23% respectively, amounting to about 410 000 people with hepatitis B and 17 000 people with hepatitis C. Without treatment, chronic infection with HBV and HCV can lead to cirrhosis and liver cancer, which is the fifth commonest cancer and the third leading cause of cancer deaths in Hong Kong. The latest statistics from Hong Kong Cancer Registry found that more than 80% of the primary liver cancer cases were related to HBV and HCV infection.

The Hong Kong Government has long attached great importance to tackling the public health burden posed by viral hepatitis. Back in the 1980s, a series of interventions have been introduced to prevent the mother-to-child transmission (MTCT) of HBV. In particular, the universal neonatal immunisation programme launched in 1988 has effectively reduced the prevalence of HBV infection in the younger generation in Hong Kong nowadays. The effort on prevention and control of viral hepatitis was further stepped up following the establishment of the Steering Committee on Prevention and Control of Viral Hepatitis in July 2018 and the formulation of the first Hong Kong Viral Hepatitis Action Plan 2020 - 2024 in October 2020. The key initiatives of using antivirals to prevent MTCT of HBV, post-vaccination serologic testing and expansion of access to direct-acting antivirals for HCV treatment have all contributed significantly to further reduction of the local burden from HBV and HCV infection.

This Action Plan is formulated to carry forward the achievements and progress made in the Action Plan 2020 - 2024 and continue the effort on viral hepatitis elimination. As outlined in the latest Global Health Sector Strategies for 2022 - 2030, the World Health Organization (WHO) has updated a set of global impact and service coverage targets to be reached by 2030 for eliminating the public health threat of viral hepatitis. These include a diagnosis and treatment coverage for viral hepatitis at 90% and 80% respectively, as well as some specific targets for both the incidence (hepatitis B: < 0.1% prevalence of hepatitis B

surface antigen among children aged below 5; hepatitis C: ≤ 5 per 100 000 in the general population and ≤ 2 per 100 among people who inject drugs) and mortality (combined hepatitis B and C: ≤ 6 per 100 000).

This Action Plan aligns with these updated WHO's global targets and shares the same vision and goals as the previous Action Plan, with a view to eliminating viral hepatitis as a public health threat in Hong Kong -

Vision

- where new viral hepatitis infections have ceased, and where everyone with chronic viral hepatitis has access to effective and affordable care and treatment

Goals

- reducing transmission of viral hepatitis, as well as morbidity and mortality due to viral hepatitis, especially liver cancer

This Action Plan adopts four strategic axes, which are developed to demonstrate an evolving strategy and a broadened scope of actions following the successful implementation of the previous Action Plan, as well as taking reference from the latest local and international developments in the prevention and control of viral hepatitis. Priority actions in each axis to be carried out in 2025 - 2030 for progressing towards the WHO targets of viral hepatitis elimination are laid down as follows.

Strategy 1: Heightening Awareness

- Awareness campaign for the general population
- Education for key populations, patients and their service providers
- Professional training for healthcare workers
- Building a supportive environment

Strategy 2: Tracking Health Sector Response

- Estimation of the burden due to chronic viral hepatitis
- Monitoring the trends of viral hepatitis
- Measurement for the Local Indicators
- Validation of prevention and control measures

Strategy 3: Preventing New Infections

- Ongoing preventive measures to stop MTCT of HBV, including antenatal screening, vaccinations, maternal antiviral prophylaxis and post-vaccination serologic testing
- Prevention of healthcare-related transmission of HBV and HCV
- Reduction of risk and disease burden in key populations

Strategy 4: Expanding Access to Screening, Care and Treatment

- Enhanced risk-based testing services for viral hepatitis
- Enhanced management of adults with chronic hepatitis B in primary care
- Macro-elimination of HCV in patients under care
- Promotion of HCV testing and linkage to care among people who inject drugs

This Action Plan outlines specific actions for the Department of Health, Hospital Authority, Primary Healthcare Commission and other stakeholders, with milestones established for key actions. Indicators have also been developed to facilitate the monitoring and evaluation of the overall health sector responses, which endeavours to progress towards the global targets for the viral hepatitis elimination by 2030. We urge everyone to support the Action Plan and join hands to render Hong Kong free from the threat of chronic viral hepatitis.