

Foreword



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Hepatitis is common in Hong Kong, particularly hepatitis B. There are at least five viruses that can cause infective hepatitis. They are namely hepatitis A, B, C, D and E viruses. Hepatitis A and E are transmitted by contaminated food and water, while hepatitis B, C and D are transmitted by blood or body fluids. Viral hepatitis can cause liver diseases. In particular, hepatitis B and C lead to chronic diseases in hundreds of millions of people and, together, are the most common cause of liver cirrhosis, cancer and viral hepatitis-related deaths.

Globally, it is estimated that about 257 million and 71 million people are living with chronic hepatitis B and C virus ("HBV and HCV") infection respectively. Epidemiological studies gauged a prevalence of 7.2% and 0.3% for HBV and HCV infection respectively in local population, amounting to about 540 000 HBV cases and 22 000 HCV cases.

The Government recognises the burden posed by viral hepatitis. Since 1988, hepatitis B vaccination has been provided to all newborns. In 1992, a one-off exercise was launched to cover all pre-school children born between 1 January 1986 and 14 November 1988. In addition, hepatitis B vaccination has been made available to the healthcare workforce and high-risk patient groups.

Since then, Hong Kong has evolved from a region of high-intermediate to intermediate-low hepatitis B endemicity, while the local prevalence of hepatitis C has remained low generally over the past decades. Although much has been done to prevent HBV and HCV infections with significant improvement in the local prevalence of hepatitis B, including universal blood safety programme, safe injection practice in healthcare facilities and neonatal hepatitis B immunisation programme, there is no room for complacency. There exist service gaps in



identifying those who are unaware of their infection status, and in making them aware of the effective medical treatment available to them.

The World Health Organization ("WHO") promulgated the *Global health sector strategy on viral hepatitis 2016 - 2021*, which outlines a global goal of eliminating viral hepatitis as a major public health threat by 2030. In recognition of the public health threat posed by viral hepatitis, the Government announced in the *2017 Policy Address* to set up a steering committee to formulate strategies to prevent and control viral hepatitis effectively. The Steering Committee on Prevention and Control of Viral Hepatitis ("SCVH") was established in July 2018 to advise the Government on the overall policy, targeted strategies and effective resource allocation related to the prevention and control of viral hepatitis. The Government also committed in the *2019 Policy Address* that, the SCVH would formulate an action plan in 2020, with a view to reducing the public health burden posed by viral hepatitis.

Thanks to the dedicated work of the SCVH, this *Hong Kong Viral Hepatitis Action Plan 2020 - 2024* provides the first road map to coordinate efforts of stakeholders in various sectors in reducing the public health burden of viral hepatitis in Hong Kong. This Action Plan outlines the overall strategies and specific actions to be taken, as well as measurable targets and indicators, to facilitate monitoring of the implementation of the Action Plan.

This is now time for the Government, the Hospital Authority, the academia and the civil society to work more closely together to drive the progress towards achieving the goal of the WHO and eliminating viral hepatitis as a major public health threat in Hong Kong by 2030.