

Preventable liver disease costs more than diabetes: Team hopes to reduce burden with research-led intervention

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Liver diseases have an impact on the Australian economy 40 per cent greater than chronic kidney disease and Type 2 diabetes combined, according to a report released today.

The report estimates the annual burden of liver diseases in Australia at more than \$50 billion. And yet almost all liver disease is preventable.

The Centenary Institute's liver research unit is one of the biggest in Australia. It is also one of first in the world to try to come to grips with liver damage at its most fundamental molecular level.

Head of research into liver disease and damage at Centenary, Professor Geoff McCaughan, and his team are focusing their research on promoting liver health, and understanding how chronic liver damage can develop into [liver cancer](#).

"New therapies against [viral hepatitis](#) together with public health measures in the fields of alcohol abuse and obesity would be a start in the fight to reduce the burden of liver disease," says Prof McCaughan. "We are exploring ways to detect early liver cancer and to understand how liver cancers are resistant to therapies."

[Liver damage](#) can be caused by viral infections such as Hepatitis B and C, as well as autoimmune diseases and lifestyle-related illnesses such as

alcoholism, diabetes and obesity.

"We're working on important projects exploring new therapeutic targets which could potentially lead to new therapies across a broad spectrum of [chronic liver diseases](#)," says Prof McCaughan.

And by working with the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital (RPA), Centenary's advances in research can be put into practice in the clinic in the minimum time possible.

The research group has received a \$2.5-million grant from the US National Institutes of Health to test the genes of hundreds of Sydney-siders to work out why some heavy drinkers develop [liver cirrhosis](#) and some don't.

They have also demonstrated the effectiveness of new Hepatitis C treatments which, when used in conjunction with existing therapy, boost the percentage of patients who clear the virus from 45 per cent to 70 per cent.

Prof McCaughan is the chair of the Australian Liver Association, which commissioned the report, and Director of the Australian Liver Transplant Unit at RPA. He believes the report is long overdue.

"It shows categorically that any advance in treating or preventing liver disease would not only benefit patients, but also the country's bottom line."

"Supporting the report's recommendations, which include more complete collection of data, trials of hospital and community treatment programs, and screening for the more serious forms of [liver disease](#), makes both human and economic sense," says Prof McCaughan.

More information: A copy of the report and further information at:
www.gesa.org.au

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