

# STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION

Many people with hepatitis C experience stigma associated with the virus. This can include stigmatisation by others as well as self-stigmatisation, where people have negative thoughts about themselves. For some people, the stigma of living with hepatitis C is worse than the virus itself. Stigma is often caused by fear and a lack of knowledge. Stigma can come from many different people, including those who work in health care.

People stigmatise hepatitis C for several reasons, including:

- **Fear of transmission**  
As hepatitis C is an infectious disease, people may be afraid they will catch it. Although it is not spread easily, many people don't know how hepatitis C is transmitted.
- **Fear of illness**  
Some people don't like to be around people who are 'sick'. People can feel uncomfortable and try to avoid those who have an illness.
- **Judgement**  
Hepatitis C is often associated with those who inject drugs as it is one of the main ways people can get hepatitis C. Stigma linked to injecting drug users is common.

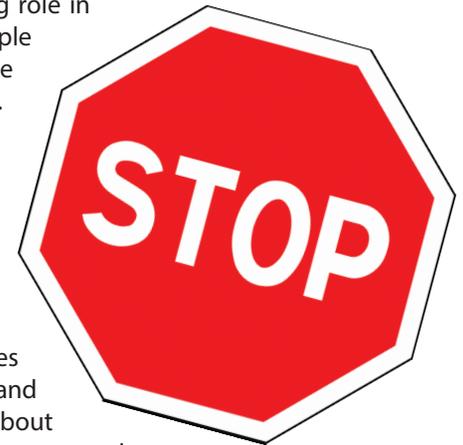
The good news is research conducted in 2012 showed most New Zealanders don't stigmatise people with hepatitis C. The study also showed 94 per cent of people believe that all people with hepatitis C have a right to access care no matter how they contracted the virus.

For those who feel like they've faced stigma, it can have a huge effect on a person's life. Some effects include reduced self-esteem, diminished mental health, avoidance of medical care and fear of disclosing a positive status. Fear of disclosure can prevent people from accessing services and also lead to reduced social support.

## STIGMA

A mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality or person. It is usually a sign of social unacceptability as it is driven by public perception and attitudes.

Education can play a big role in reducing stigma. People can discriminate because they don't understand. Sometimes our own views about hepatitis C can cause stigma. It is important to have a healthy attitude towards your hepatitis C diagnosis. By educating communities about hepatitis C and learning to feel good about yourself, the stigma can be removed.



Stigma can sometimes cause discrimination. Discriminating against people with hepatitis is against the law, as stated in the Human Rights Act 1993. This includes situations in employment, services, health care, accommodation, and study. Everyone has the right to be treated fairly and with respect.

You do not have to tell anyone you have hepatitis, but you may choose to share this information with people who are affected or for support.

Keep an eye out in an upcoming edition of *Talking Hep C* for information about disclosing your hepatitis C status to others.

### Ways to cope with stigma:

- Educate yourself and others as inaccurate information can create fear and stereotypes.
- Get support and do not isolate yourself.
- Talk to other people who have hepatitis C.
- Have a positive attitude about yourself and your hepatitis C diagnosis.

## DISCRIMINATION

Treating someone differently or unfairly because they have a certain characteristic.