**Three Dublin-based groups come together for ‘CThis’ campaign to encourage hepatitis C testing on World Hepatitis Day**

***Up to 50,000 Irish people at risk from ‘hidden’ disease***

**Sunday 27th July**: A giant green letter C will be travelling through Dublin city this week to create awareness of hepatitis C, a disease that affects up to 50,000 people in Ireland1 but is still misunderstood. The *‘CThis’* campaign, for World Hepatitis Day (28th July), will be encouraging people who may be at-risk to learn more about the condition by visiting the revamped website HepInfo.ie that contains information on how to get tested and seek support.

The awareness initiative is supported by Community Response, Dublin Aids Alliance and UISCE, who collectively provide support and advocate on behalf of people with blood borne viruses as well as drug users. The three groups are uniting to call on people who could be at-risk of hepatitis C to get tested. People who need more information can visit www.hepinfo.ie and also ring the HSE helpline on 1800 459 459.

The two metre tall green C was developed to symbolise the magnitude of hepatitis C and to support local health promotion of the campaign. The *‘CThis’* team will visit a number of different Dublin locations this week (please see below) and volunteers will be on hand to provide the public with information on the disease and how they can get tested.

Hepatitis C is often referred to as a silent epidemic. Although up to 50,000 Irish people may be infected with hepatitis C1, in the early stages most people don’t experience any symptoms and therefore don’t realise they have the virus2. This leads to people not being diagnosed until more serious symptoms occur, such as cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver. Up to 1,000 new cases are identified each year with up to 20 per cent of these developing cirrhosis of the liver2.

Hepatitis C is transmitted from person to person through blood-to-blood contact. While many falsely believe that this is exclusively a consequence of sharing needles, there are many other ways that the virus can be transmitted, including unscreened infected blood and blood products (in countries without screening processes in place), needle stick injuries, tattooing, piercing and acupuncture, and medical, surgical or dental procedures1. However, there are treatments emerging that will make a dramatic difference to the lives of patients.

**Nicola Perry of Community Response** said: *“Hepatitis C is often misunderstood by the public. It can be confused with hepatitis A or B where there are vaccines available. Hepatitis C cannot currently be vaccinated against and can lead to a long-term infection. People need to be aware how hepatitis C is contracted and get tested if they feel they could be at-risk.”*

While approximately 75% of hepatitis C cases are associated with drug use2, many people have kicked their drug habit and are now leading normal lives, completely unaware that they have a virus that is causing serious damage to their liver. Testing is available for free at public STI clinics.

**Niall Mulligan, Director at Dublin Aids Alliance** added*: “We are delighted to partner with Community Response and UISCE on this project. This initiative is fundamental in ensuring that those who may be at risk of hepatitis C have access to the information needed, particularly the availability of free testing at a range of public clinics, including a monthly clinic at Dublin Aids Alliance. Testing is essential for preventing transmission of hepatitis C, and also ensures that those who may test positive have access to support and treatment.”*

**Ruaidhri McAuliffe of UISCE** said: “*World Hepatitis Day is a great opportunity for us to create awareness of hepatitis C, particularly among injecting drug users. We feel it is important to promote harm reduction strategies aimed at prevention, as well as encourage people to avail of treatment for hepatitis C. Access to clean injecting equipment needs to be improved, particularly outside the Dublin area. People who currently or previously injected drugs need to be made aware of the improved effectiveness of treatments. It’s important that people who have engaged in risky behaviour in the past recognise that even though time has passed and they have changed their lifestyle they can still be left with the legacy of this virus. The ‘right to health’ is universal”.*

**Dr Shay Keating, Drug Treatment Centre Board**, said: “*The treatments for hepatitis C have evolved hugely in recent years. Patients no longer have to endure gruelling treatment, for one thing. By creating more awareness of hepatitis C and highlighting how it can be contracted it is hoped that more people would recognise their potential risk and get tested.”*

The three groups will engage in a unique week-long series of information events that will be taking place across the city to coincide with World Hepatitis Day – all centred on the two metre high ‘Big Green C’. The groups will have local members on hand to provide practical advice and support for those looking for information on the disease, and will be encouraging the general public to take ‘SelfCies’ with the giant green C and tweet to raise awareness of the campaign using the hashtag #CThis.

The ‘Big Green C’ will visit the following locations:

* Dublin Castle, Barnardos Square, Monday 28th July (World Hepatitis Day) 12.00 pm – 2.00pm
* Parnell Street, Cineworld - Tuesday 29th July
* Heuston Station - Wednesday 30th July
* GPO, O’Connell Street - Thursday 31st July
* Grafton Street, St. Stephen’s Green - Friday 1st August

For more information please go to HepInfo.ie. The World Hepatitis Day campaign is supported by AbbVie.

**Ends**

For more information please contact Orla Dormer, First Medical Communications on 01 665 0300 / 085 708 6877 odormer@firstmedical.ie

**Editor’s Notes**

2014 HPSC figures3 show that:

* Men are more likely to have hepatitis C than women.
* The incidence of hepatitis C is proportionately higher in the eastern part of the country - 73% of all hepatitis C cases in 2013 were reported in the HSE East area.

References:

1. HSE, National Hepatitis C Strategy, 2011-2014
2. HPSC Annual Report 2012 – 5.2 Hepatitis C
3. HPSC - Report on Hepatitis C Notifications Quarter 1 – 4, 2013

**About Community Response**

Community Response Ltd, established in 1990, based in the Liberties in the South Inner City of Dublin, provides a comprehensive programme for primary alcohol and hepatitis C services. Community Response offers a range of services in relation to hepatitis c, group support, one-to-one support and referral pathways to treatment.

**About Dublin Aids Alliance**

Established in 1987, Dublin AIDS Alliance (DAA) Ltd is a voluntary organisation working to improve conditions for people living with or affected by HIV and hepatitis, and to combat related stigma and discrimination.

DAA operates under an ethos of equality and is committed to making a positive contribution towards a humane and just society. We strive to ensure that our staff, volunteers and service users are treated with dignity and respect at all times and to create an environment that promotes equal opportunity

**About UISCE**

The Union for Improved Services Communication and Education (UISCE), an advocacy and lobby group for drug users, is based in the North Inner City. UISCE work to ensure that those in need of services have their voice heard by policy-makers and practitioners. UISCE represent the voice of drug users both locally and nationally. Key activities include highlighting relevant issues affecting drug users and users of drug service, gathering and disseminating information to relevant bodies and facilitating the participation of drug users in local structures to improve access to, and quality of, services in the local area.