

SUNBURY/MACEDON RANGES

# Help for hep C sufferers

### Special training at community clinics make treatment more accessible

Ed Gardiner

SUNBURY and Macedon Ranges community health workers have been further skilled in assisting hepatitis C sufferers under a new program targeting intravenous drug users.

Needle and syringe workers at 14 community clinics across the state including Sunbury Community Health, Cobaw Community Health and Macedon Ranges Health are set to be trained in the prevention of hepatitis C, prevalent among the more than 40,000 Victorians who inject drugs.

Cobaw Community Health health worker Julie Sutcliffe said the training would make a big difference, with the clinic serving as a "one-stop shop" for many vulnerable clients.

"Drug and alcohol substance abusers don't find it easy to seek support and tend to fly under the radar quite a lot, so anything that creates a better opportunity to seek treatment and get information is great," she said.

Ms Sutcliffe said more work had to be done to combat the fear and stigma surrounding the disease.

"Up until recently people who were diagnosed with hepatitis C were required to go through onerous testing and attend clinics outside of the area where they lived," she said.

"Now the treatment is tablets, it's not long term and it's much more accessible — it's not something to be terrified of anymore."

Independent drug education group Penington Institute will teach workers about the virus itself, new treatments and how to connect clients with testing and treatment.

Penington Institute chief executive John Ryan said treatment for hepatitis C had advanced dramatically in recent years to a near-perfect success rate — but in a cruel twist, those most at risk of the disease were least likely to get treatment.

"For some people, needle and syringe programs are the only point of contact available to provide lifesaving advice and avenues for treatment, so it's vital the workers at these centres are equipped to help," he said.

Treatment outcomes for hepatitis C victims have improved dramatically, with authorities predicting the disease will be eradicated from Australia within 10 years.

Hepatitis C, which is spread by blood-to-blood contact, affects the liver and can be fatal.

"We have a responsibility to raise awareness in the community about these new treatments that will ultimately save lives," Mr Sutcliffe said.



Witchcraft expert Michael Cati is set for the Bohemian Bulla Market. Picture: ROB LEESON

## GO ON SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

WITCHES covert broomsticks for their usefulness but they are far more likely to sweep up a mess than go for a ride over murky skies.

Michael Cati considers himself a witch, a broad term he describes as beliefs with align with his "soul space".

"I study various religions, beliefs and mythologies in the context of nature and

take on what resonates with my spiritual journey," he said.

"Witchcraft is the practical side of being a witch."

Mr Cati said witches have had exaggerated dispersions placed on them over generations — folkloric symbols such as cauldrons were just cooking pots and wands were wooden spoons. His business Alchemy

Earthy is one of about 130 stalls at this Sunday's Bohemian Bulla Market. He will present a free talk Witchcraft Today from noon.

The Bohemian Bulla Market has run since 2015 on the third Saturday of the month outside January, June and July. It runs beside the Bulla Miniature Trains in Green St Bulla from 9am to 3pm.

MACEDON RANGES

# Push still on for recycling solution

Barry Kennedy

MACEDON Ranges Council is continuing to grapple with how the municipality's recycling will be collected into the future.

Council executives were continuing discussions with contractor Wheelie Waste yesterday as the State Government also weighed into the issue as a deadline imposed by Visy Recycling, now unable to export materials to China, passed.

Macedon Ranges mayor Jennifer Anderson urged residents to continue to put out their recycling bins.

"Wheelie Waste has assured us they will continue to collect recycling in the shire and the message to residents is to continue to put out your recycling bins," she said.

"Residents have done a great job supporting recycling and we as a council remained committed to recycling."

Cr Anderson said a long-term solution remained the challenge.

"There are other places we could potentially take recyclables, but we have to investigate the logistics and cost implications."

Several other regional Victorian councils are affected by the impasse.

Environment Minister Lily D'Ambrosio said the government was working to break the stalemate.

"The current situation has come about through market failure — and as a matter of urgency we are working with industry, local councils and other governments to find the best way to manage our recyclable materials in the short-term while other longer-term solutions are identified," she said.

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