

## **Media Release**

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### **Public Health Champion 2009 is Canterbury's Cheryl Brunton**

A bullet in her letterbox is one of the more unusual features in the life of Medical Officer of Health, Dr Cheryl Brunton, who last night was named Public Health Champion for 2009.

Paying tribute to Dr Brunton at the Public Health Association conference dinner in Dunedin, the president Richard Egan said despite quite personal attacks, including the bullet in the letterbox, she was a courageous advocate of gun control on both a local and national level.

"She used the same determination to bring the issue of hepatitis C to national awareness, and it has driven her work, over the last 20 years, with injecting drug users (IDU) and the needle exchange programme. This is a public health practitioner who takes on unpopular issues and never gives up doing everything she can to improve the health of those affected by them," Mr Egan told the delegates.

Apart from her role as a Medical Officer of Health for the West Coast and Canterbury, Dr Brunton is also a senior lecturer in public health at the University of Otago in Christchurch.

"Many students, in particular those in the Masters of Public Health programme are indebted to her inspiring, expert guidance and her encouragement as their supervisor and mentor," Mr Egan said.

Dr Brunton's work with hepatitis C began when she investigated an outbreak at Christchurch Prison in 1991. This led to an on-going interest in hepatitis C research and advocacy. She helped establish the Auckland and Christchurch Hep C support groups, was instrumental in founding the Christchurch Hepatitis C Resource Centre and was the inaugural chair of its trust board. She also took part in the development of the first national Hepatitis C Action plan.

"She continues to arrange conferences, workshops and training on Hep C, played a part in the establishment of the Hepatitis C community clinic in Christchurch, and is part of its advisory group.

"Stemming from her work in Hep C, Cheryl has also worked with injecting drug user groups and the needle exchange programme for almost 20 years. She helps to conduct national needle exchange serosurveys and has led and encouraged research into blood-borne viruses among IDU. She's advocated for needle exchange as a public health measure and worked to counter the stigma and discrimination towards Hep C, injecting drug use and needle exchange."

Dr Brunton's other recent research interests have included the impact of the reform of prostitution law, influenza in travellers, a survey of vaccine-preventable disease and a hand sanitiser study.

"If this did not make her busy enough, she's also been an active member of the Public Health Association's Canterbury branch since it began. She's made an

invaluable contribution to the priorities and aims of the organisation and to public health throughout New Zealand.”

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