

# The hepatitis B story

An illustration of a family of six sitting around a round table, eating a meal. The table is set with various dishes, including a large platter of colorful vegetables, a bowl of rice, and several small bowls of food. There are also glasses of orange juice. The family consists of a man in a blue shirt, a woman in a white floral shirt, a young girl in a pink shirt, a young boy in a yellow shirt, and two older people, one in a red shirt and one in a purple shirt. The background is dark blue with string lights and three red lanterns hanging from the ceiling.

Information in plain English  
Information from St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne

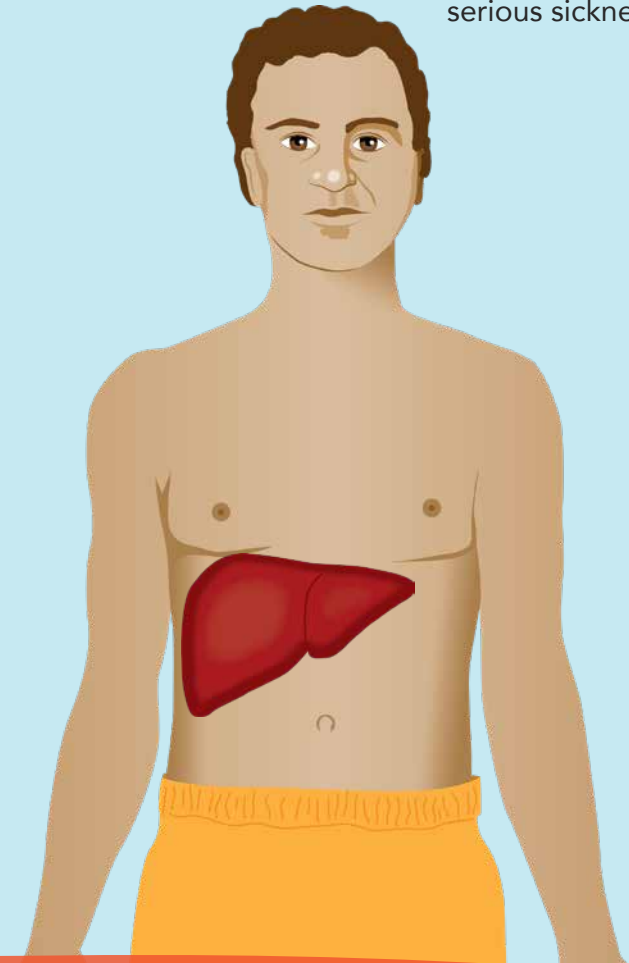
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This book is available online and in videos in several languages.  
Go to St Vincent's Melbourne website at:  
[www.svhm.org.au/home/health-professionals/specialist-clinics/g/gastroenterology](http://www.svhm.org.au/home/health-professionals/specialist-clinics/g/gastroenterology)

# What is the liver and hepatitis B?

The liver is the largest organ in the body. A healthy liver cleans the blood, fights off infection, helps to break down food and nutrients and stores vitamins. Hepatitis B is a virus that is too small to see but it can cause serious sickness in the liver and the body.



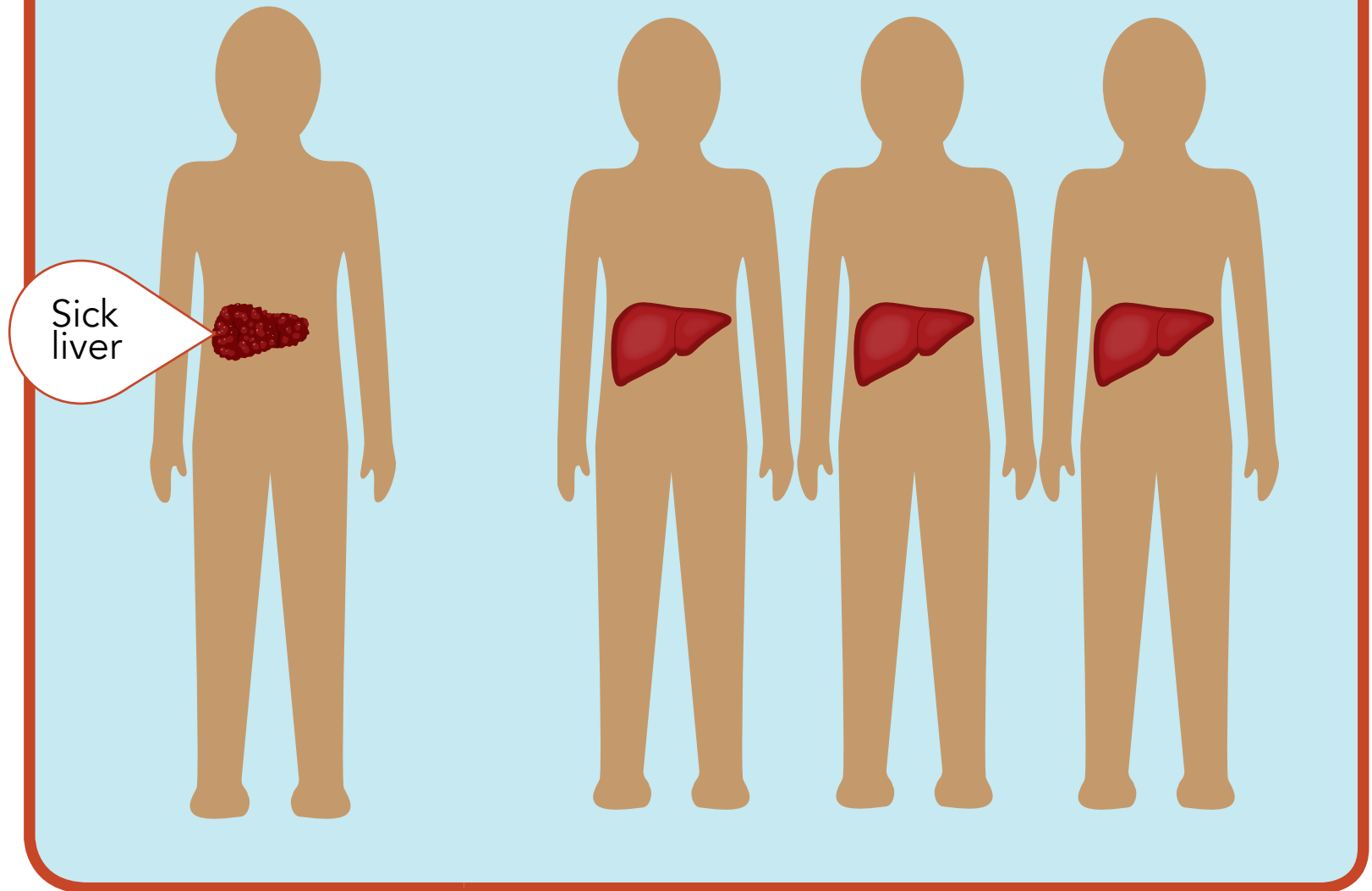
# How does hepatitis B affect you?

The hepatitis B virus can make the liver inflamed and scarred and then the liver cannot do its job to keep you healthy. Most people with hepatitis B do not feel sick until the disease is very advanced. They have no symptoms. People may start to feel sick, tired, have pain or fever when the liver is very inflamed and scarred.

Most people get hepatitis B as a baby or young child and they have the virus for life. This is called 'chronic' hepatitis B. The virus can 'sleep' and cause no real health problems for a long time. But the virus can 'wake up' in some people and make them very sick.

Of every four people who have chronic hepatitis B one will get liver scarring (known as cirrhosis), liver cancer or liver failure and become very sick if they do not get treatment. A check-up at the doctor every 6 months will help to prevent this.

## FOUR PEOPLE LIVING WITH CHRONIC HEPATITIS B





# Who has chronic hepatitis B?

Many countries have large numbers of people who live with chronic hepatitis B. Men and women born in:

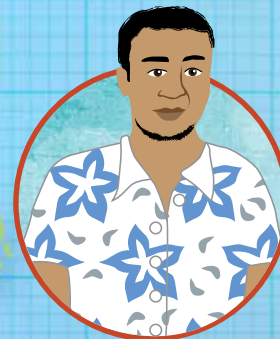
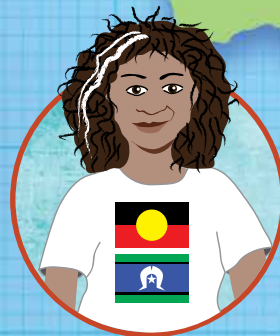
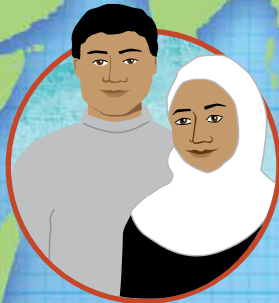
- Asia
- The Pacific Islands
- Africa
- The Caribbean
- Southern Europe
- The Middle East

are more likely to live with hepatitis B.

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait**

**Islander people** also have high rates of hepatitis B.

Hepatitis B is often found in several people in the same family. Most people get hepatitis B when they are a baby or young child. If you have hepatitis B it is important that your brothers, sisters, parents, partner and children are tested to see if they have hepatitis B.



# How do you get hepatitis B?

The hepatitis B virus is carried in the blood and sexual fluids. Most people get hepatitis B when they are born or very young. Babies can get hepatitis B at birth if their mother has hepatitis B.

If we know the mother has hepatitis B, check-ups and medicines during pregnancy can protect the new born baby from getting the virus.

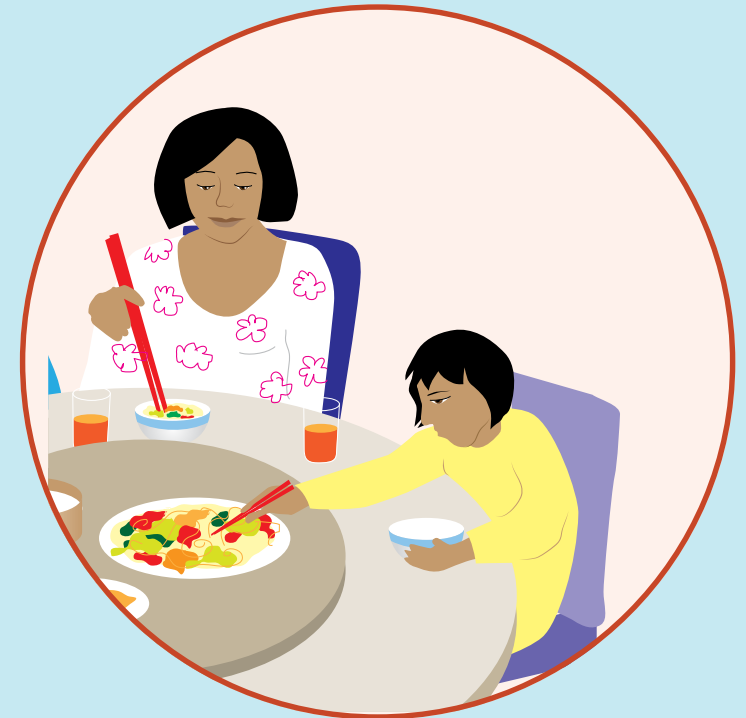


**You may also get it from someone who has hepatitis B by:**

- Sharing needles and equipment for tattoos, piercing, injecting drugs.
- Sharing razors, toothbrushes, nail clippers and earrings.
- Contact with the blood or open sores of an infected person.
- Having sex without a condom.

## You DO NOT get hepatitis B from:

- Mosquitoes.
- Sharing food, drinks and cigarettes.
- Sharing plates, cups, forks, spoons and chopsticks.
- Breastfeeding.
- Touching, kissing, hugging.
- Coughing or sneezing.
- Sex using a condom.





# Tests to check for hepatitis B

Of every two people who have chronic hepatitis B, one does not know they have it. Ask your doctor or nurse for a simple hepatitis B blood test to check. The results of the test will come back to the doctor in 2 weeks. This test will show:

- If you have chronic hepatitis B,
- If you are protected because you had the hepatitis B vaccinations or,
- If you need to have hepatitis B vaccinations.

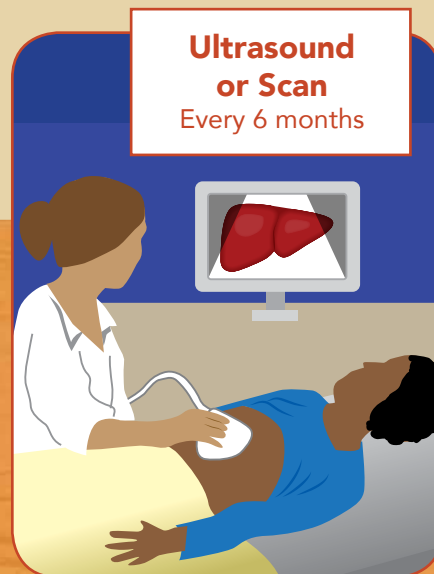
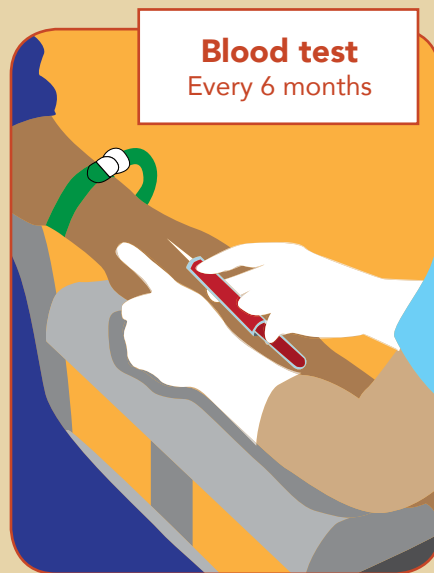


# Check-ups

The hepatitis B virus in your liver changes over time. Check-ups every 6 months are very important and tell the doctor about any damage in your liver. This means having a blood test and maybe an *ultrasound* or scan.

The test results will tell the doctor if you need to start taking medicine.

Most people with chronic hepatitis B do not need to take tablets as the virus is 'sleeping' and is not causing damage to the liver. The doctor may ask you to see a special hepatitis doctor.



# Treatment and medicine



You may need to take tablets in the future if the virus 'wakes up' and starts to damage your liver. You will need to take these tablets every day to help prevent liver damage and liver cancer. This medicine does not cure hepatitis B and it will not make the virus go away. But it does help to reduce damage to your liver and liver cancer. It helps to keep the virus under control.

**It is important to continue to have regular check-ups.**

# Stay healthy and well

## These things help you to be healthy

- Eat a variety of foods. Eat more fruit, vegetables, rice, grains, nuts, fish and tofu.
- Be a healthy body weight.
- Exercise and keep active. Try walking with family and friends. Try football, dancing or tai chi.
- Get a check-up at the doctor every 6 months.
- Get vaccination for hepatitis A.
- Avoid drinking alcohol and taking drugs.
- Stop smoking cigarettes.
- Don't eat much take-away food, chips, sweets, processed meats, cakes or sweet drinks.

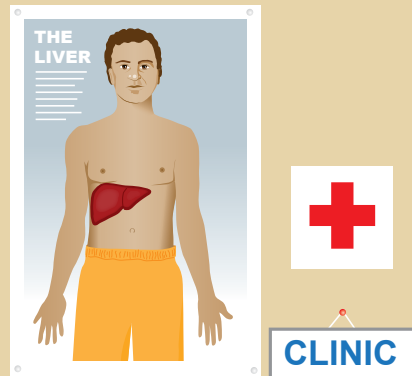




# Having a baby

All new born babies in Australia are offered a free course of four hepatitis B vaccinations. These injections usually stop children from getting hepatitis B.

If a pregnant woman has hepatitis B she needs to have special check-ups. She may need to take medicine in the last months of pregnancy to stop the baby getting the virus during the birth. The babies of mothers living with chronic hepatitis B are offered an extra injection soon after birth. This will stop most babies from getting the hepatitis B virus. The mother and the baby then need to have regular check-ups for many years.



# Caring for your family: Preventing hepatitis B

Hepatitis B vaccination is the best way for your family and those close to you to be protected against hepatitis B. Remember that hepatitis B is often found in several people in the same family. If you have chronic hepatitis B it is important that your brothers, sisters, parents, wife, husband, sexual partner and children are tested to find out if they have hepatitis B.

If they have not got hepatitis B they can get a free course of hepatitis B vaccination.

It is important to check that family members sharing a house with you know about the vaccination to protect them.

## REMEMBER TO TAKE CARE

Vaccination is the best way for your family and those close to you to be protected against hepatitis B.

Clean up blood, cover open sores.

Do not share razors, toothbrushes, nail clippers or earrings.

Do not share needles and equipment for tattoos, piercing or injecting drugs.

Use condoms when having sex with a new partner or person who is not vaccinated.



# Living with chronic hepatitis B: What does it mean for you?

Some people want to tell friends and family they have chronic hepatitis B. Other people may feel shame and worry - they do not want to talk about hepatitis B. It can be helpful to talk to people who understand you. Take time to decide who you can trust. It is important to think about telling the people in your house and your sexual partners so they can be tested and get a vaccination. It may be helpful to talk about this with your nurse or doctor.



## REMEMBER



Vaccination can protect people so they don't get hepatitis B.

Chronic hepatitis B can cause liver disease and liver cancer.

Ask your doctor for a blood test to check if you have hepatitis B.

Treatment for hepatitis B reduces the chance of liver damage and cancer. Medicines work well and are easy to take.

Get a check-up at the doctor every 6 months if you have chronic hepatitis B.





# Where to get help and more information?

Your Community Health Centre  
Your doctor, GP or clinic nurse

Hep B Help website –  
for community & clinicians  
[www.hepbhelp.org.au](http://www.hepbhelp.org.au)

**Organisations working with refugee and migrant communities in hepatitis and sexual health.**

Victoria – Multicultural Health and Support Service (CEH)  
Phone: (03) 9418 9929  
[www.ceh.org.au](http://www.ceh.org.au)

NSW - Multicultural HIV and Hepatitis Service  
Phone: (02) 9515 1234  
[www.mhahs.org.au](http://www.mhahs.org.au)

South Australia – PEACE Multicultural Services (Relationships Australia)  
Phone: (08) 8245 8100  
[www.rasa.org.au/services/couples-families/peace-multicultural-services/](http://www.rasa.org.au/services/couples-families/peace-multicultural-services/)

Queensland – Hepatitis, HIV and Sexual Health Program (ECCV)  
Phone: (07) 3255 1540  
[www.eccq.com.au](http://www.eccq.com.au)

Western Australia - Multicultural Health Services Centre of WA  
Phone: (08) 9328 2699  
[www.mscwa.com.au](http://www.mscwa.com.au)

## All states

National Hepatitis Information Line  
Phone: 1800 437 222  
[www.hepatitisaustralia.com.au](http://www.hepatitisaustralia.com.au)  
Link to hepatitis organisation in your state.

Multicultural Women's Health Australia  
Phone: 1800 656 421  
[www.mcwh.com.au/mwha.php](http://www.mcwh.com.au/mwha.php)

Cancer Council Australia Helpline  
Phone: 13 11 20. Interpreters available.

Australian Multicultural BBV/STI Alliance  
Phone: (03) 9418 9929  
[www.multiculturalbbvsti.org.au](http://www.multiculturalbbvsti.org.au)

Health Direct (Nurse on call)  
Phone: 1800 022 222  
24 hr health advice.



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Phone: 131 45

# Acknowledgements

## Concept and Project Manager:

Gabrielle Bennett, Victorian Viral Hepatitis Educator, St Vincent's Melbourne.  
Email: [gabrielle.bennett@svha.org.au](mailto:gabrielle.bennett@svha.org.au)

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## Illustrations:

Jenny Bowman Email: [jenbowman@netspace.net.au](mailto:jenbowman@netspace.net.au)

## Graphic design:

Ray Hehr, Swivel Design Email: [info@swivel-design.com.au](mailto:info@swivel-design.com.au)

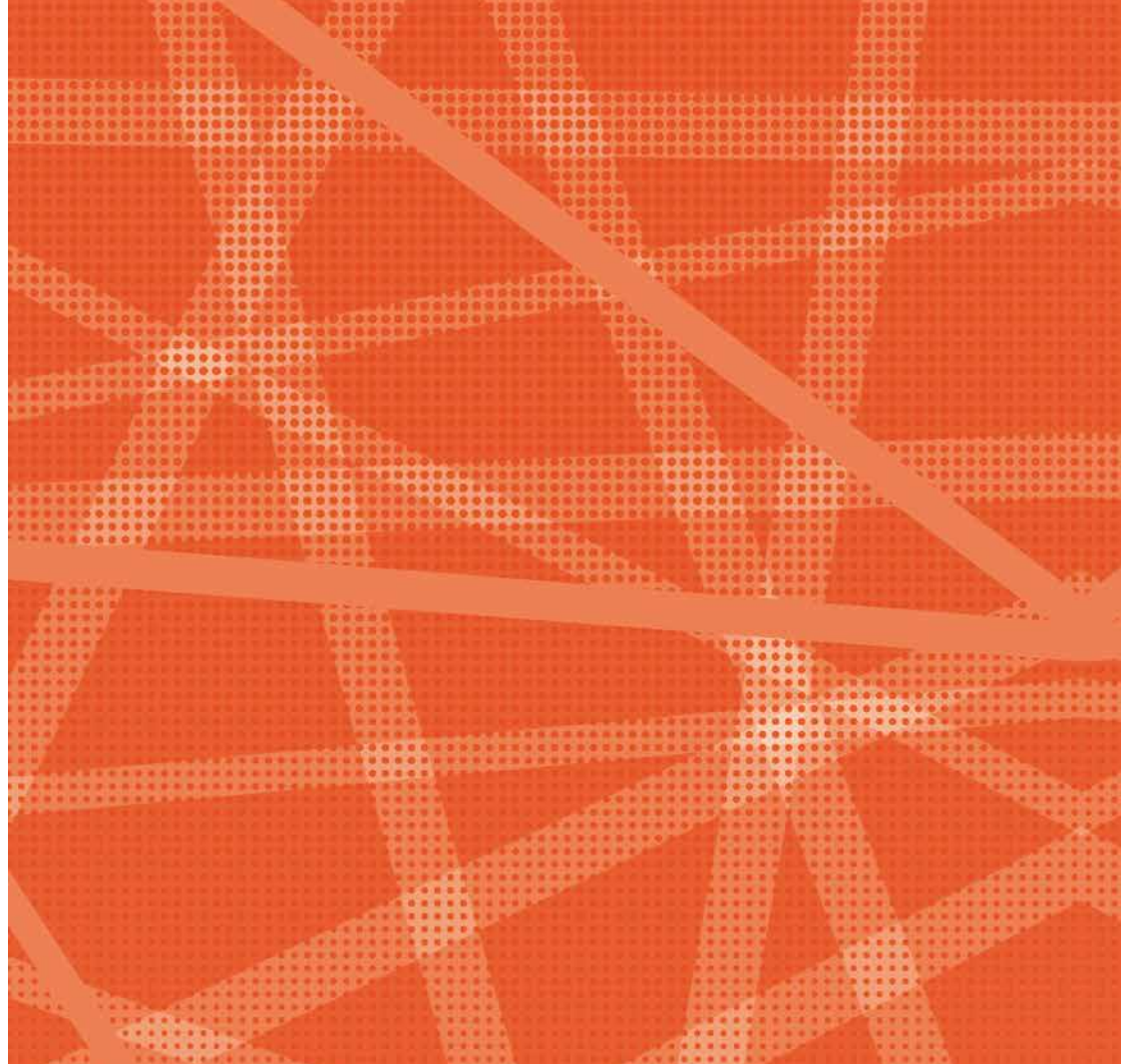
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