



THE AIDS INSTITUTE

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THE AIDS INSTITUTE RECOGNIZES WORLD HEPATITIS DAY *Viral Hepatitis Can Be Eliminated as a Public Health Threat*

Washington, DC – “The AIDS Institute is proud to join in the World Health Organization's recognition of [World Hepatitis Day](#) and its goal of eliminating hepatitis globally,” said Michael Ruppal, Executive Director of The AIDS Institute.

World Hepatitis Day, created in 2010, is one of only four WHO-official disease-specific world health days recognized each year. People across the globe are taking part in activities today, July 28th, to raise awareness about viral hepatitis, to call for better access to treatment and prevention programs, and to advocate for further government action. This year's theme is “**Eliminate Hepatitis**”. As part of this effort The AIDS Institute penned an [opinion piece](#) in yesterday's Morning Consult on the need for state Medicaid programs to lift their restrictions on HCV treatment.

According to the WHO, between 130 - 150 million people globally have hepatitis C (HCV), and two billion people have had hepatitis B (HBV). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates there are 5.3 million people living with viral hepatitis in the United States, yet more than half are unaware of their infection. As a result of the current opioid epidemic, the United States is experiencing an unprecedented increase in HCV infections, with a nearly 300% increase in new cases between 2010 and 2015. New HBV cases are also on the rise, reversing a long trend of reductions in new cases.

While new cases have been on the rise, several recent reports have outlined how viral hepatitis can be eliminated as a public health threat both in the United States and internationally. The CDC's [Division of Viral Hepatitis](#), the [National Academies](#), the [Department of Health and Human Services](#), and the [World Health Organization](#) have all issued reports and strategies outlining ways to decrease or eliminate viral hepatitis. Common themes in the reports include the need for increased resources and treatment.

Currently, funding for the CDC's viral hepatitis programs stands at only \$34 million, far below the \$308 million a December 2016 professional judgment budget estimates is

needed to put the United State on the path to eliminating viral hepatitis. The AIDS Institute and others have asked Congress to increase funding to at least \$70 million in FY2018.

“Eliminating viral hepatitis in the U.S. requires dramatically increasing our investment in viral hepatitis prevention programs,” commented Frank Hood, Hepatitis Policy Associate at The AIDS Institute. “The need for Congress to robustly fund hepatitis prevention is clear, given the rapidly increasing number of new infections and the current gaps in surveillance, testing, and education.”

Eliminating viral hepatitis will also require curing those living with HCV of their disease. However, numerous state Medicaid programs restrict HCV curative treatments to only those patients who have severe liver damage or who have abstained from substance use. This is occurring despite the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services sending a [State Notice](#) in November 2015 warning states they cannot restrict access to approved HCV drugs for non-medical reasons. Since that Notice, several states have expanded access, but mostly as a result of or the threat of litigation.

“Currently, patients in some states are forced to wait until they become very sick before they are able to access the cure,” noted Carl Schmid, Deputy Executive Director of The AIDS Institute. “These restrictions go against expert treatment guidelines and Medicaid’s own policies. The AIDS Institute calls on states to lift these discriminatory restrictions and on CMS to enforce the federal Medicaid law so that beneficiaries can access HCV curative drugs. We have a cure for hepatitis but those that need it must have access to it if we’re going to eliminate hepatitis.”

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The AIDS Institute is a national nonprofit organization that promotes action for social change through public policy, research, advocacy and education.

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