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THE AIDS INSTITUTE URGES FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF NATIONAL VIRAL HEPATITIS ACTION PLAN

Increased Funding Needed to Eliminate Viral Hepatitis in the United States

Washington, DC – “The AIDS Institute applauds the Department of Health and Human Services on its 2017-2020 update to the ‘[National Viral Hepatitis Action Plan](#)’, and urges President Trump and his administration, along with Congress, to fully implement and fund it in order to begin to eliminate viral hepatitis in the United States,” said Carl Schmid, Deputy Executive Director of The AIDS Institute.

The National Viral Hepatitis Action Plan was first released in 2011, updated in 2014, and “marked the beginning of a coordinated national response to viral hepatitis in the United States.” The latest update lays out the strategy needed to prevent new viral hepatitis infections, reduce the number of hepatitis-related deaths, improve health outcomes for people with viral hepatitis, and track the implementation of viral hepatitis activities nationally. In addition, the plan sets new goals and indicators of progress to guide the United States’ response to viral hepatitis and towards its elimination.

“Insufficient investments in public health, education, treatment, and surveillance services are key challenges that must be addressed to successfully implement the Action Plan,” added Schmid. “The administration and Congress have an opportunity to address these challenges by fully supporting implementation of the National Viral Hepatitis Action Plan and providing leadership and funding in order to help meet its goals.”

“One area where additional funding is critical is the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Division of Viral Hepatitis”, said Frank Hood, Hepatitis C Policy Associate at The AIDS Institute. The division and its grantees are tasked with tracking, researching, and eliminating viral hepatitis in the United States.

“Currently, its funding is at only \$34 million. This is well below the \$308 million a recent professional judgment prepared by the CDC estimates is needed for a national viral hepatitis program focused on decreasing mortality and reducing the spread of the disease.”

The latest update to the Action Plan introduces 17 indicators of progress used to measure the success of the country's efforts to treat and eventually eliminate viral hepatitis between 2017 and 2020. Some of these indicators include decreasing the number of new HBV and HCV infections by 60% and increasing the rate of HBV vaccines given at birth to 85%.

This update also provides analysis on how newly discovered curative treatments for HCV can be used to reduce the number of people living with the virus. According to the Action Plan, only nine percent of individuals with HCV have been cured of the disease as of 2014, despite there now being treatments with cure rates higher than 90 percent. An increase in the number of individuals being treated will help reduce new infections, liver cancer rates, and HCV-related deaths, and will greatly contribute to elimination efforts.

There are an estimated 1.4 million people in the United States living with hepatitis B (HBV) and 3.9 million living with hepatitis C (HCV). Every year, more than 20,000 people in the United States die from viral hepatitis and its complications. Unfortunately, the number of deaths is on the rise with a nearly 20 percent increase in annual deaths since 2010. The annual number of HCV-associated deaths now exceeds the number of deaths from 60 other nationally notifiable diseases (including HIV) combined.

“Achieving the goals of the Action Plan over the next three years will go a long way towards eliminating viral hepatitis in the United States. We look forward to working with President Trump, his Administration, and Congress to fully implement and fund the National Viral Hepatitis Action Plan,” concluded Schmid.

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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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