THE AIDS INSTITUTE APPLAUDS DRAFT UPDATE TO NATIONAL VIRAL HEPATITIS STRATEGIC PLAN
Hepatitis Elimination Possible but Requires Coordination and Resources

Washington, DC – The AIDS Institute applauds the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) on its release of the draft update to the Viral Hepatitis National Strategic Plan for the United States: A Roadmap to Elimination (2021–2025). The plan, initially released in 2011 and last updated in 2014, is essential to coordinating the nation’s response as it faces unprecedented hepatitis A outbreaks, stalled progress on preventing hepatitis B, and new annual hepatitis C cases that have quadrupled between 2010 and 2018.

“The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has taken an important step by updating this plan,” says Rachel Klein, deputy executive director at The AIDS Institute. “We’ve lost ground in the battle against viral hepatitis over the past decade; reversing course will require implementing this plan with significant new public health funding. We hope Members of Congress have learned from the COVID-19 experience that supporting the public health infrastructure is crucial to protect our citizens and defend our nation’s economic health.”

The latest update focuses on eliminating viral hepatitis via five main goals:

- preventing new viral hepatitis infections;
- improving viral hepatitis-related health outcomes of people living with viral hepatitis;
- reducing viral hepatitis-related health disparities and health inequities;
- improving viral hepatitis surveillance and data usage; and
- achieving integrated, coordinated efforts that address the viral hepatitis epidemics among all partners and stakeholders.

The draft plan also addresses challenges posed by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
“The draft plan is far-reaching and if properly implemented, can guide the nation towards eliminating viral hepatitis in this country,” says Frank Hood, manager of hepatitis advocacy at The AIDS Institute. “Proper implementation will require increased funding for the national public health and viral hepatitis infrastructures. Congress must address this growing public health threat, which has an outsized impact on the very same communities currently being ravaged by COVID-19.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the primary federal agency tasked with viral hepatitis prevention, surveillance, and funding state and local viral hepatitis efforts, received just $39 million in viral hepatitis funding in 2020. In 2020, Congress also allocated $10 million to address the infectious disease consequences of the opioid crisis, a key driver of new viral hepatitis cases. Experts estimate that the CDC would need nearly $4 billion over the next decade to mount an effective viral hepatitis response.

The plan was published in today’s Federal Register. All comments must be submitted electronically to HepatitisPlanComments@hhs.gov and received by 5:00 p.m. ET on October 8 to ensure consideration.

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