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SENATE PASSES OPIOID PACKAGE, INCLUDES EFFORT TO COMBAT INFECTIOUS DISEASES
Authorizes $40 million Annually to CDC

Washington, DC - Today, the U.S. Senate passed the “Opioid Crisis Response Act of 2018”, which includes the “Eliminating Opioid Related Infectious Diseases Act of 2018”. The bill passed by a 99-1 vote.

“We applaud the Senate for passing the opioid package and including the ’Eliminating Opioid Related Infectious Diseases Act of 2018.’ When enacted, it will help states and community-based organizations mobilize resources to respond to the alarming spike in new cases of HIV and viral hepatitis associated with injection drug use, which has been heightened by the opioid epidemic,” said Carl Schmid, Deputy Executive Director of The AIDS Institute.

The bipartisan measure, originally introduced by Sens. Todd Young (R-IN), Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), and Edward Markey (D-MA), authorizes $40 million a year over five years for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to assist state and local governments and others to enhance surveillance systems to track opioid use-related infectious diseases, increase HIV and hepatitis testing and prevention, and improve linkage to HIV and hepatitis treatment and substance use disorder treatment.

According to surveillance data released earlier this year by the CDC, new cases of hepatitis C (HCV) rose 350 percent between 2010 and 2016. HCV deaths now surpass deaths associated with all 60 other notifiable infectious diseases combined. While progress has been made in reducing the number of new HIV infections in the country, including the number of new cases associated with injection drug use, the opioid crisis can reverse this trend. Certain communities and areas of the country, including those who are young and living in rural areas, are experiencing increases of HIV due to injection drug use.
The Scott County, Indiana HIV and HCV outbreak cast a spotlight on the risk of rapid transmission of infectious disease among people who inject drugs and the lack of sufficient state and local resources to rapidly respond. The CDC has identified 220 counties across 26 states that are vulnerable to similar outbreaks.

“Providing the CDC and its grantees with additional resources for surveillance, testing, prevention, and education efforts will go a long way in helping the country successfully combat increases in infectious disease cases,” said Frank Hood, Senior Policy Associate at The AIDS Institute. “At the same time, people can be linked to infectious disease and substance use treatment, and reduce injection drug use, thus helping further curb the opioid crisis.”

Similar bipartisan legislation, introduced by Reps. Leonard Lance (R-NJ) and Joseph Kennedy III (D-MA), easily passed in the House and is included in the “SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act”.

The AIDS Institute urges the Congress to move quickly to conference the legislation and send the opioid response package to the President for his signature. Additionally, The AIDS Institute asks Congress to include the necessary funding in the FY2019 appropriation bill to ensure the infectious disease prevention activities authorized in the bill can be carried out as soon as possible.

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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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