March 7, 2014

Virginia Moyer, MD, MPH
Chair
U.S. Preventive Services Task Force
540 Gaither Road
Rockville, MD 20850

Re: Comments on the USPSTF Recommendations for Screening for Hepatitis B Virus Infection in Non-pregnant Adolescents and Adults

Dear Dr. Moyer,

The AIDS Institute is a national nonprofit organization providing leadership in HIV/AIDS and hepatitis public policy, advocacy, research and education that seeks to reduce the number of new HIV and hepatitis infections and bring people who have these illnesses into lifesaving care and treatment. We are pleased to comment and offer our strong support of the draft guidelines put forth by the United States Preventative Services Task Force (USPSTF) regarding hepatitis B virus (HBV) screening, which recommend a “B” grade for testing of individuals at high risk for HBV infection.

We are providing comments regarding the recommended grade for HBV screening because the majority of the estimated 1.4 million people with HBV are unaware of their infection, and those that do become aware are typically at the point of having advanced liver disease or cancer. We know that 15-25% of the approximately 1.4 million people living with HBV will die from the disease. Through increased screening, people with HBV can learn of their infection, seek treatment, and live relatively healthy lives.

Additionally, by screening and learning of one’s infection, the transmission of HBV from unaware persons to others can be avoided. For those who are tested and are negative, their providers can recommend immunization for them so that they will not contract the virus in the future.

The proposed grade change will now align with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s recommendation for routine testing, including those born in countries with 2% or greater prevalence of hepatitis B, those born in the United States who were not vaccinated in
infancy and whose parents were born in a country with a high prevalence of hepatitis B, persons who inject drugs, HIV positive individuals, men who have sex with men, and household contacts or sexual partners of those who have HBV infection.

The AIDS Institute commends the USPSTF for issuing a “B” grade and recognizing the national burden of HBV in the United States, its potential progression to liver disease and liver cancer, and raising the profile of HBV as a public health priority. We look forward to the finalization of these recommendations and encourage the USPSTF to issue its final recommendation prior to national Hepatitis Testing Day on May 19.

Sincerely,

Carl Schmid
Deputy Executive Director
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