CONGRESS BEGINS TO PROVIDE ADDITIONAL FUNDING FOR INFECTIOUS DISEASES DUE TO OPIOID EPIDEMIC
Flat Funds Most HIV Programs; No Dedicated Increases for Hepatitis Programs

Washington, DC – The AIDS Institute is pleased that both the House and Senate are beginning to provide additional funding in their FY2019 Labor HHS Appropriation bills to address the escalating increases in infectious diseases due to injection drug use associated with the opioid epidemic.

Hepatitis C cases jumped 22 percent in just 2016 alone and have skyrocketed 350 percent between 2010 and 2016. HIV diagnoses among people who inject drugs have increased 33 percent in the Midwest between 2014 and 2016.

While it is far less than what is needed and what was proposed by the President, the House Labor, HHS Appropriations Subcommittee has recommended a $20 million Infectious Disease Elimination Initiative at the CDC to eliminate new infections of HIV, hepatitis, STDs and TB in cities and states, including those with high rates of opioid-related transmission. The House also proposed a new $300 million Infectious Disease Rapid Response Reserve Fund for the CDC to use in the event of “an imminent infectious disease outbreak”, including in those areas “disproportionately affected by the opioid crisis”. Funding for SAMHSA is also increased, and the House press release stated that while there is a federal prohibition on the purchase of needles in syringe service programs it “allows communities with rapid increases in cases of HIV and Hepatitis to access federal funds for other activities, including substance-use counseling and treatment referrals.”

Yesterday, the Senate approved its version of the health spending bill in Subcommittee and included a new $5 million program at the CDC to “combat infectious diseases directly related to opioid use” with a focus on HIV and hepatitis.
Both the **House** and **Senate** rejected most of the cuts to HIV programs proposed by the Trump Administration, many of which were included in House bills in years past. For example, funding was maintained for CDC’s HIV Prevention Programs; the HRSA Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program; and the HHS Secretary and SAMHSA’s Minority AIDS Initiative programs. Each had been proposed to be cut, or in some instances eliminated, in the President’s budget. Unfortunately, the House did eliminate funding for the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program, Title X, and critical funding for ACA programs. The House and Senate both proposed increases for abstinence-only until marriage programs. Both bills include significant increases for medical research at the National Institutes of Health.

Funding for dedicated hepatitis activities at the CDC remains flat at only $39 million in both bills.

“While we are pleased that Congress is beginning to increase funding to combat the infectious diseases associated with the opioid epidemic, dedicated funding for CDC’s hepatitis program still desperately needs to be increased,” commented Carl Schmid, Deputy Executive Director of The AIDS Institute.

The hepatitis community had requested an increase of $95 million to add to the $5 million increase that it received this year.

Currently, there is an estimated 4 million people living with hepatitis C in the U.S and more than half of them remain undiagnosed. Left untreated, it can cause liver damage, cirrhosis, and liver cancer. Hepatitis C can now be cured and eliminated, but first people must be educated, screened and linked to care and treatment, and there needs to be a national hepatitis surveillance system.

“As the bills move through the Congress, The AIDS Institute hopes that additional funding will be directed to the CDC for both HIV and hepatitis prevention activities, while also addressing the new cases of infectious diseases associated with increased injection drug use,” said Michael Ruppal, Executive Director, The AIDS Institute. “We now have the knowledge and tools to end both HIV and hepatitis C, but neither can occur if we do not have the financial resources, health care system and right policies in place.”

The full **House** Appropriations Committee is slated to consider its bill in July while the **Senate** Appropriations Committee is scheduled to markup its bill on Thursday, June 28th.  

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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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