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**Hep B United Applauds U.S. Preventive Services Task Force for
Draft Hepatitis B Screening Recommendation**

Recommendation Will Help Reduce Disease Burden by Encouraging Hepatitis B Screening Among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders

Oakland, CA – Hep B United, a national campaign to address and eliminate hepatitis B, today applauded the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) for issuing a “B” grade, recommending screening for hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection in persons at high risk, including Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs), who make up 5 percent of the total population in the United States, but account for more than 50 percent of Americans living with chronic hepatitis B.

“This is a great milestone in our mission to decrease the burden of hepatitis B in the United States, one that could potentially save millions of lives,” said Joan M. Block, RN, BSN, executive director of the Hepatitis B Foundation and co-chair of Hep B United. “Our community has long been dedicated to raising awareness about the importance of hepatitis B screening and encouraging testing for those with the greatest risk, including Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, who are disproportionately affected. We commend the Task Force for removing some of the barriers to testing and look forward to the finalization of these recommendations.”

The USPSTF draft recommendation applies to asymptomatic, non-pregnant adolescents and adults who have not been vaccinated and other individuals at high risk for HBV infection. This includes people born in countries where the prevalence of the disease is greater than 2%, as well as those who were born in the United States, but have at least one parent who was born in a region with a high prevalence. This is in contrast to the previous USPSTF recommendation released in 2004, which gave the asymptomatic population a “D” grade, signifying that it was not recommended.

Hepatitis B is common in many parts of Asia and the Pacific Islands, and spreads easily. It is estimated that 1 in 12 AAPIs is living with hepatitis B, yet nearly two out of three do not know they are infected; hepatitis B often displays no symptoms until serious liver damage has already occurred. AAPIs not born in the United States are at particularly high risk, due to high rates of hepatitis B in their native countries, where many people became infected as infants or young children.

Left untreated, up to 25 percent of people with hepatitis B develop serious liver problems, including liver cancer. In fact, liver cancer caused by the hepatitis B virus is a leading cause of cancer deaths among

AAPIs. Testing is critical to identify people living with chronic hepatitis B and help them access life-saving medical care.

“The release of these draft recommendations represents a monumental step forward in our efforts to address and eliminate the many health disparities facing the diverse and medically underserved AAPI population in the United States,” said Jeffrey B. Caballero, M.P.H., executive director of the Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations (AAPCHO) and co-chair of Hep B United. “We applaud USPSTF for acknowledging the burden of hepatitis B in this community and making the right decision to promote screening in high risk individuals.”

“I am encouraged by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force’s updated draft screening and testing recommendations for Hepatitis B,” said Rep. Mike Honda (D-CA), Chair Emeritus of Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, Co-Chair Hepatitis Caucus. “I am especially glad that the recommendations target individuals who are at higher risk, including the foreign born from high prevalence countries. As the Chair Emeritus of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, and a founder of the Congressional Hepatitis Caucus, I have long advocated for the increased screening and testing of the Asian American Pacific Islander population, who are disproportionately affected by this silent killer. The “B” grade will help to ensure that necessary resources are targeted to address the health disparities of the AAPI population. This is an important step in reducing Hepatitis B in this vulnerable community.”

“As Vice Chair of Congress’s Hepatitis Caucus and as a strong advocate who has been working on this issue for some time, I am pleased by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force’s sound decision on expanding screening for hepatitis B,” said Rep. Charlie Dent (R-PA), also a co-sponsor of H.R. 3723, The Viral Hepatitis Testing Act of 2013. “The decision will greatly benefit Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders who suffer from the disease disproportionately.”

The Task Force’s draft recommendation is open for [public comment](#) through March 10, 2014.

About Hep B United

Hep B United is a national coalition to address the public health challenge of hepatitis B. The goal of Hep B United is to support local community coalition efforts across the U.S. to increase hepatitis B awareness, screening, vaccination and linkage to care for all Americans, but in particular, for high-risk Asian American and Pacific Islander populations who are disproportionately impacted. For more information on Hep B United, please visit <http://hepbunited.org>. To learn more about their regional coalitions, please visit <http://hepbunited.org/local-campaigns>.

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