



Hepatitis B Foundation
Baruch S. Blumberg Institute



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Contact: Ryan Clary, National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable
202-407-2391 | rclary@nvhr.org | www.nvhr.org

Community Advocates Applaud U.S. Representatives' Call for Leadership, Resources to Combat Deadly Epidemics on World Hepatitis Day

Persistence of mother-to-child hepatitis B transmission, astronomical rise of hepatitis C cases related to opioid crisis highlight urgency of tackling largest blood-borne communicable epidemics in U.S.

WASHINGTON, D.C., Tuesday, July 28, 2015 – This World Hepatitis Day, U.S. Representatives Mike Honda (D-Silicon Valley), Hank Johnson (D-GA), and Judy Chu (D-CA) joined together to call on their Congressional colleagues for bold leadership and increased resources to adequately combat the hepatitis B and hepatitis C epidemics in the United States. These chronic, communicable, potentially life-threatening conditions – and the largest drivers of liver cancer domestically – affect an estimated 6 million Americans, though distressingly, 65-75% are unaware of their status.

“We have an incredible opportunity to eliminate hepatitis B and hepatitis C in the U.S., with effective prevention and treatment options,” said Ryan Clary, Executive Director of the National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable. “The only question is, will our leaders step up to take advantage of this opportunity, and commit to rectifying the highly inadequate response to the needs of millions of Americans?”

Despite a safe, proven vaccine preventing hepatitis B infection, perinatal transmission needlessly persists, due to such inattention. “Hepatitis B is the world's deadliest vaccine-preventable disease; therefore, now is the time to move aggressively to end mother-to-child transmission of this lethal virus,” said Joan Block, RN, BSN, Executive Director of the Hepatitis B Foundation and Co-Founder of Hep B United. “The elimination of perinatal hepatitis B transmission is included in key documents like the HHS National Viral Hepatitis Action Plan because we have a highly effective vaccine, clear medical guidelines, and the public health infrastructure to achieve this success.”

The steep rise in hepatitis C cases among young people under 30, as illustrated by recent outbreaks in states like Indiana, Kentucky, and West Virginia, could also have been avoided. “We know syringe services programs, opioid substitution therapy, and now, curative treatment can make a significant impact in preventing and stopping transmission of hepatitis C among drug injecting communities,” said Clary. “It is long past time to bring these interventions to scale, because those with substance use disorders deserve every opportunity to live as safely and healthily as possible.”

Yet, as Murray Penner, Executive Director of the National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors notes, “[t]he United States Congress has allocated only \$31.3 million per year toward viral hepatitis prevention. This is roughly half of the \$62 million requested by President Obama for fiscal year 2016, and far less than the \$170.3 million recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Division of Viral Hepatitis

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Professional Judgment Budget in 2010. Health department Viral Hepatitis Prevention Coordinators – the front line in coordinating prevention efforts and the only national prevention effort – receive less than \$1 in federal funding for every person living with hepatitis in the U.S. This is wholly inadequate. We cannot begin to adequately prevent and eventually eliminate hepatitis in the United States without increased investment in the Division of Viral Hepatitis.”

Hepatitis B and C patient advocates applaud Congressmen Honda and Johnson and Congresswoman Chu for joining the global community to call for swift action and resources proportional to the significant burden of these epidemics.

About Hep B United

Hep B United is a national coalition to address and eliminate hepatitis B, a serious liver infection that is the leading cause of liver cancer. An estimated 2 million people in the United States are chronically infected with the hepatitis B virus. Hep B United aims to meet this public health challenge by increasing hepatitis B awareness, testing, vaccination and treatment. To learn more, visit www.hepbunited.org.

About Hepatitis B Foundation

Headquartered in Doylestown, Pa., the Hepatitis B Foundation was founded in 1991 and is the only national nonprofit organization solely dedicated to finding a cure for hepatitis B and improving the quality of life for those affected worldwide through research, education and patient advocacy. To learn more, visit www.hepb.org.

About National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors (NASTAD)

Founded in 1992, NASTAD is a nonprofit national association of state and territorial health department HIV/AIDS program directors who have programmatic responsibility for administering HIV/AIDS and viral hepatitis health care, prevention, education, and supportive services programs funded by state and federal governments. For more information, visit www.NASTAD.org.

About National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable (NVHR)

The National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable is a broad coalition working to fight, and ultimately end, the hepatitis B and hepatitis C epidemics. We seek an aggressive response from policymakers, public health officials, medical and health care providers, the media, and the general public through our advocacy, education, and technical assistance. Please visit us at www.nvhr.org.

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