Advocates Announce First National Meeting on Viral Hepatitis Criminalization

The Center for HIV Law and Policy, the Harm Reduction Coalition and the National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable are behind the effort.

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Health and harm reduction advocates have come together to announce the first national meeting on viral hepatitis criminalization, which will take place Thursday, November 1, 2018, in Louisville, Kentucky. The Center for HIV Law and Policy (CHLP), the Harm Reduction Coalition (HRC) and the National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable (NVHR) are behind the groundbreaking effort, according to a recent press release from the organizations.

The event will convene harm reduction, syringe access, viral hepatitis and HIV criminalization advocates to help raise awareness of laws that make it a crime to expose (or seemingly expose) another person to viral hepatitis and to discuss strategies regarding outreach, law, policy and community. Advocates have long argued that these rules are purposely discriminatory, stigmatize the virus and, in some cases, criminalize behavior that poses little or no risk of harm to others.

Currently, more than a dozen states have laws on the books that criminalize perceived or accidental exposure to viral hepatitis. Many of these states also restrict access to treatment for large swaths of their populations, while limiting the availability of syringe exchange programs for injection drug users. And as rates of hepatitis C virus (HCV) continue to increase across the country (more than doubling in the past decade), legal watchdogs say more states are considering instituting these laws.

“Laws that criminalize even unintentional exposure to viral hepatitis can only discourage individuals from getting tested and seeking treatment for the disease,” said Tina Broder, interim executive director of NVHR, adding “All individuals living with viral hepatitis deserve access to comprehensive treatment and harm reduction services; criminalizing people’s health status undermines our ability to solve this growing public health crisis.”

To learn more about the upcoming conference in Louisville, click here.

To read the organizations’ accompanying fact sheet “Punishment Is Not a Public Health Strategy:

The Criminalization of Viral Hepatitis in the United States” click here.

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