Cherokee Nation Seeks Complete Elimination of Hep C

They are the first community in the United States to set this goal

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The Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma has become the first community in the United States to set a goal to completely eliminate hepatitis C virus (HCV) from its population, PBS reports. If successful, U.S. health authorities believe the tribe's ambitious program could become a national model for eliminating hep C in the future.

HCV rates are nearly five times higher among Native Americans than the national average. Native Americans are also twice as likely to die from liver disease than other Americans, a problem perpetuated by higher rates of injection drug use, alcohol use and lack of access to health care in the community.

That's why in 2012 Cherokee officials began working with the University of Oklahoma, the Oklahoma State Department of Health and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to design a targeted hep C elimination program for their community.

The initiative, launched in late 2015, is taking one of the country's most aggressive approaches to ending the epidemic, with plans to eliminate the virus in the Cherokee population as soon as possible, rather than staging treatment for the sickest people or those found to be most at-risk for the virus.

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