Congress Members Introduce the NASH Care Act of 2020

If passed, the law would boost liver disease research and create a national strategy to tackle non-alcoholic steatohepatitis.

November 17, 2020 By Trent Straube

Linked to obesity and diabetes, non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) and its more severe form, non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH), are fast becoming the most common types of liver disease in the United States. Even though they're responsible for about 26% of liver-related deaths in the nation, no federal plan exists to tackle the growing problem. So it's welcome news that two congressmen introduced the Nonalcoholic Steatohepatitis (NASH) Care Act of 2020 (HR 8658).

The bill aims to create a national strategy to prevent, diagnose and treat NASH. It's sponsored by Representatives Dan Crenshaw (R–Texas) and Raul Ruiz (D–Calif.).

The Global Liver Institute (GLI) applauded the introduction of the bill and underscored its need, noting that NASH affects between 148 million and 444 million people worldwide and adding that the bill would "elevate liver disease research and initiatives within the National Institutes of Health (NIH) by renaming the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) to include liver and creating a division of liver diseases."

Liver health advocates point out that their work on getting the bill passed has just begun. The legislation will have to be reintroduced in the new Congress next year, and the bill's sponsors will have to drum up support from other lawmakers before the bill becomes a law.

NAFLD is caused by excess fat in the liver (hepatic steatosis). Over time, this can result in inflammation and damage (NASH), cirrhosis (scarring of the liver), liver cancer and even liver failure. It's estimated that between 5% and 30% of the U.S. population has NAFLD. It's often linked with weight gain (particularly at the waistline), type 2 diabetes, high triglycerides or low HDL/high LDL cholesterol. NAFLD is also prevalent among people living with HIV, affecting about 31% of that population according to a 2009 study.

NAFLD and NASH have proved elusive to treat, and lifestyle changes remain the main approach for managing fatty liver disease. These include eating a healthy diet, increasing physical activity and losing weight.

To learn about the latest research developments, see “What’s in the Pipeline for NAFLD and NASH Treatment?” For more about the basics of these two forms of non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, click here.

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