Eliminating Hepatitis C Coast to Coast

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New treatments that cure hepatitis C more than 90 percent of the time are a major advancement for people living with hepatitis C virus (HCV), but that's not the only benefit of these new therapies. Widespread treatment also offers the possibility of eliminating hepatitis C as a public health threat.

"Treatment as prevention" methods are effective in the fight against HIV, and there's growing evidence that such a method can work for hepatitis C too. Researchers recently reported that new HCV infections among gay men in Amsterdam have fallen by half since the Netherlands adopted a policy of unrestricted access to hepatitis C treatment. Studies from Australia and the United Kingdom have shown that treating people with HCV who are likely to transmit the virus—such as active injection drug users—can have a big impact on curbing the epidemic.

In February, public health experts, advocates and government officials convened in Albany for the first-of-its-kind Hepatitis C Elimination Summit with the aim of creating a framework for eliminating HCV in New York state—and securing a legislative buy-in and funding for it—along the lines of the state's Blueprint to End the AIDS Epidemic.

During the six months leading up to the summit, nearly 100 stakeholders worked together to lay the groundwork for the plan and convened town hall meetings to mobilize community support. Key aspects of the strategy include increased HCV screening, expanded access to treatment and stepped-up harm reduction efforts for people who inject drugs.

On the West Coast, San Francisco is spearheading the hepatitis C elimination effort at the city level. Launched last July on World Hepatitis Day, the End Hep C SF initiative aims to reduce the health consequences of hepatitis C, break the cycle of transmission and end HCV-related inequities. A strategic plan was made available for public comment in February and is now being finalized.

The San Francisco effort draws on the wisdom of service providers, activists, people who inject drugs and others who are most affected by and have been fighting against the spread of hepatitis C for many years. In addition to expanding HCV testing and treatment, End Hep C SF also aims to end stigma around hepatitis C and maximize the health and wellness of people who use drugs.

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