Harm Reduction Coalition and Gilead to Combat Hepatitis C in Appalachia

The HepConnect initiative aims to expand testing, harm reduction and health care infrastructure.

April 15, 2019 By Casey Halter

States with the highest hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection rates are set to get an influx of funding to combat the virus over the next five years. The Harm Reduction Coalition (HRC) and Gilead Sciences last week announced a new multimillion-dollar initiative aimed at reducing new infections, according to a press release.

Called HepConnect, the program will support evidence-based solutions to meet the need of Americans most affected by the opioid crisis in Indiana, Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee and West Virginia. Both groups will work with local organizations to ramp up testing, harm reduction and health care infrastructure in the region.

HepConnect came about as the result of a call for proposals issued by Gilead last December. The pharmaceutical company says it selected HRC as the lead grantee because of its capacity to guide strategic planning and provide the technical assistance and management needed to roll out such a large program.

“We are committed to ensuring these resources generate maximum impact by reaching organizations and programs operating on the front lines,” said Monique Tula, executive director of the Harm Reduction Coalition. “We’re thrilled about Gilead’s commitment to innovation and proud to collaborate with them to deepen harm reduction work that will make a meaningful difference for people affected by HCV across greater Appalachia.”

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, new hepatitis C infections have more than tripled throughout Appalachia between 2006 and 2012, largely as a result of an increase in injection drug use. To learn more about hepatitis C in Appalachia, click here.

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