Hundreds Gather in Albany for the Nation's First Hepatitis C Elimination Summit

February 7, 2017

Over 100 #advocates in #Albany to raise #awareness and send a call for state action to #EndHepC in #NewYork. #NASTAD #endhep #takeactionnow pic.twitter.com/swdKUBE39E

— NASTAD (@NASTAD) February 6, 2017

Hundreds of state and national leaders have convened in Albany this week for the United States' first Hepatitis C Elimination Summit. Ultimately, their goal is to create a framework for eliminating the liver virus across New York state, similar to the HIV/AIDS Ending the Epidemic Blueprint, a recent Housing Works press release reports.

Over the past six months, nearly 100 community stakeholders—including health experts, providers, government officials and hepatitis C advocates from 50 different hospitals, universities, health departments and community-based organizations—have been working together to build a strategy for eliminating hepatitis C virus (HCV) in New York state. Leading up to the historic convention, the collective also held eight town hall meetings across the state to ensure community support for the effort.

It is estimated that over 200,000 New Yorkers are infected with hepatitis C. Despite the existence of effective oral treatments that cure the virus, state health authorities say HCV-related mortality is on the rise throughout the region. Reasons include significant barriers to treatment, medical care and preventive care, as well as New York's ongoing opioid epidemic, which is driving new infections.

During the all-day summit, which will be held on Tuesday, February 7, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Empire State Plaza, hepatitis C treatment advocates will present their recommendations for ending the epidemic to members of the State Assembly and Senate. Priority recommendations will then be reviewed by representatives from the collective's five work groups: prevention; testing and linkage; care and treatment; data, surveillance and metrics; and social determinants of health. Organizers expect attendance of more than 200 people.

The Hepatitis C Elimination Summit is modeled closely after New York's prior Ending the Epidemic campaign, a three-point plan put into action in 2014 that seeks to reduce the number of new HIV infections to 750 by 2020 and achieve the first-ever decrease in HIV prevalence in New York state. Advocates say this new HCV blueprint will include disease-control targets and recommendations for a variety of initiatives, from hepatitis C prevention and harm reduction to treatment and other HCV-related care.

Catch a live stream of the summit here beginning at 10 a.m.

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