How’s New York State Doing in Its Efforts to Eliminate Hepatitis C?

“We’re going to see a surge in cases,” TAG’s Annette Gaudino tells WCNY about New York’s hepatitis C efforts. “We have fallen behind.”

March 18, 2021 By Trent Straube

In March 2018, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo committed to tackle the hepatitis C epidemic. Soon after, the state became the first to launch an official plan to end hepatitis C virus (HCV). Cuomo appointed a state Hepatitis C Elimination Task Force and earmarked $5 million annually to the cause.

Three years later, what’s happening on that front? Not as much as expected. Most of the blame can’t be laid on the catastrophic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, which struck this time last year, although that health crisis will likely fuel new hep C cases in New York.

“I don’t think we can continue to point to COVID as a reason why work on other infection disease isn’t getting done,” Annette Gaudino, director of policy strategy at the Treatment Action Group (TAG), told WCNY Radio’s The Capitol Pressroom in an interview about the state’s hepatitis C efforts. (TAG is a community-based activist group that works to ensure that people living with HIV, hepatitis C or tuberculosis can access information, care and treatment.)

.@NYGovCuomo ain’t no hero https://t.co/OFt4LOhXSP

— Annette Gaudino (@AnnetteGaudino) March 13, 2021

“While COVID was raging in New York state and New York City, services, screenings diagnoses and linkage to care effectively stopped because peer workers didn’t have PPE [personal protective equipment], because of social distancing and everything that was happening. But it’s pretty safe to say we’re going to see a surge in [hepatitis C] cases as folks start to come back to the health care system.”

“There are people who have now been waiting over a year to start their treatment—let’s get them into treatment,” Gaudino noted. “We have fallen behind. And we have also wasted many months

while the governor’s office was holding up these recommendations. So let’s get to work.”

She was referring to recommendations included in a report by the Hepatitis C Elimination Task Force that was completed in June 2019, according to Gaudino, who was a member of the task force.

“The report was not published, and our recommendations are still under review,” she said. “I want to see this work out in the public so we can all take a look at it and critique it and take the pieces we can act on and act on them.”

> Coming soon! The Hepatitis C (HCV) Dashboard aims to measure and track progress towards eliminating #HepatitisC in New York State. #hcv #HepC #NYS https://t.co/kZp97eKbHJ
>
> — HCVDashboardNY (@HCVDashboardNY) June 22, 2020

In looking at other aspects of the HCV epidemic in New York state, Gaudino noted, “We have pretty good infrastructure for diagnoses, and we have excellent clinical providers in New York state, but we’re not getting enough people tested to know their status and get them into treatment.”

Gaudino also pointed out that an online hepatitis C dashboard is in the works. The online tool will include metrics, targets and goals and make data accessible to the public. The site is up and running—visit HCVDashboardNY.org—but it only includes a timeline of key milestones in the state’s effort to eliminate hep C.

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