



VA on Track to Eliminate Hepatitis C in Veterans by End of 2018

The agency will have treated more than 125,000 veterans since it started offering next-generation treatments in 2014.

March 8, 2018 By [Casey Halter](#)

Officials from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) have announced that the agency is on track to eliminate hepatitis C virus (HCV) in all veterans willing and able to be treated by the end of 2018. The announcement marks a major milestone in the nation's fight against viral hepatitis and means that more than 125,000 veterans will have received lifesaving cures by next October, [Forbes reports](#).

VA Secretary David J. Shulkin, MD, made the announcement at the 24th Annual Wharton Health Care Business Conference. Shulkin began by reminding audiences that in October 2014, the VA had over 146,000 veterans living with hepatitis C under its care, a number that's expected to drop to just 20,000 by October, thanks to the agency's commitment to providing hepatitis C treatment.

The announcement stands in stark contrast to news articles from just a few years back that bemoaned the fact that the government couldn't afford to treat tens of thousands of U.S. veterans living with hepatitis C, many of whom were infected during the Vietnam War. This was back when Sovaldi (sofosbuvir), Gilead's 12-week hepatitis cure cost nearly \$84,000 per patient and threatened to cripple the VA's budget.

However, the VA is allowed by law to negotiate drug prices. In addition, several other hepatitis C cures—such as AbbVie's Viekira Pak (dasabuvir, ombitasir, paritaprevir, ritonavir) and Merck's Zepatier (elbasvir, grazoprevir)—have been brought to market over the last few years, driving competition up and drug costs down. Now, the VA can effectively treat veterans at a cost of roughly \$25,300 per individual.

The VA estimates that it will spend nearly \$751.2 million on hepatitis C treatment in 2018, slightly up from the \$748.8 million it spent last year.
