Washington State Aims to Eliminate Hepatitis C by 2030

Governor Jay Inslee announced the state's ambitious plan earlier this fall.

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Washington is the latest state to launch its own hepatitis C virus (HCV) elimination strategy, with plans to eliminate new infections by 2030, a recent press release from Governor Jay Inslee reports.

The ambitious plan orders state agencies to work with local public health, tribal governments and other partners to implement a statewide elimination plan that ramps up testing, treatment and care for at-risk and affected patients. To that end, the state's Health Care Authority will lead a first-of-its-kind negotiation directly with drug manufacturers to secure the best prices for treatment, which will then be distributed across the state, including Washington's Department of Correction, Department of Labor & Industries and Department of Health facilities.

It's estimated that nearly 65,000 Washingtonians are living with chronic hepatitis. From 2012 to 2017, state health officials newly identified nearly 40,000 cases of the virus and say hepatitis C reports have been steadily increasing every year since 2012. The epidemic, largely made up of undiagnosed baby boomers, appears to be getting worse with the nation's ongoing opioid crisis.

Ultimately, Washington aims to pay for hepatitis C treatment for more than 4,000 state-covered patients every year. And while the initial upfront cost will be high, state health officials say the plan will help significantly cut the nearly $114 million spent on HCV-related hospitalizations (between 2010 and 2014), for which taxpayers are currently footing the bill.

Additionally, Washington's Department of Health will be leading a public-private partnership for the development of a more comprehensive elimination strategy, and will soon convene a hepatitis C elimination coordinating committee. The DOH also says it will ramp up hepatitis C testing, care and prevention in collaboration with state legislature and governing bodies.

"If the federal government can't do it, it's about time a state does what it can to not only take advantage of the hep C cure available and try to eliminate it but also try to rein in pharmacy costs," said state Representative Eileen Cody, chair of Washington's House Health Care and Wellness Committee. "I support the governor's approach on this and look forward to working with him to make this happen for Washington."

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