Celebrating Freedom From Hepatitis C

July 4, 2016 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

NASTAD is a potent ally to the hepatitis C community. Don't let the fact that the word "hepatitis" is absent from their name fool you. The National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors (NASTAD) is leading the viral hepatitis battle, along with many other fine hepatitis advocacy organizations.

In case you missed NASTAD's press release, "Public Health Association Launches Campaign to Support U.S. Health Departments in Accelerating the End of HIV and Hepatitis," I thought Independence Day would be a good day to bring NASTAD's efforts to the foreground.

On May 25,2016, NASTAD launched the "Ready to End the HIV and Viral Hepatitis Epidemics" Chair's Challenge that calls on U.S. health departments to accelerate the end of HIV and viral hepatitis in the U.S.

Here is the Chair's Challenge:

- "State and territorial health departments will sign on to a commitment pledge and policy statement that reaffirms the tremendous opportunity and role they play in accelerating ending the epidemics.
- NASTAD will survey health departments to determine the minimum program and policy building blocks that must be in place to support impactful HIV and hepatitis prevention and care programs, and assess where health departments land on the continuum of these minimum requirements.
- NASTAD will develop a "report card" for health departments on core health department competencies. NASTAD's technical assistance, including state-level policy activities, will then be prioritized to address where the greatest impact can be made to support health departments in modernizing these programs and policies."

NASTAD Executive Director Murray Penner stated, "For the first time in history, we have scientifically-validated and effective prevention and care modalities that prove ending the HIV and hepatitis epidemics is feasible. We have come a long way in our ability to support all people living

with HIV and hepatitis to lead long and healthy lives. Make no mistake, there is heavy lifting to do, including reimagining how we work together across siloes and institutions. In many communities, there are often significant political, financial, cultural, and other hurdles to overcome. With enough patience, passion, strategy, and resources, these obstacles can be overcome."

NASTAD Board Chair, DeAnn Gruber issued a challenge to all of her colleagues in both states and cities to "join NASTAD in re-imagining our work with a clear eye toward ending the epidemics. This is not business as usual. We have a unique opportunity at this moment in history to change the trajectory of HIV and hepatitis forever."

There are many kinds of freedom. Freedom to quality, affordable health care and freedom from hepatitis B and C are within our reach. Looking forward to a day when we can celebrate these freedoms together.

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