NVHR Applauds New AASLD and IDSA Guidelines for Hepatitis C Screening and Treatment for At-Risk Populations

Updated hepatitis C recommendations emphasize screening for key populations and treatment for all people living with HCV.

May 25, 2018 By NVHR

WASHINGTON, DC (May 25, 2018) – The National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable (NVHR), a national coalition working together to eliminate hepatitis B and C in the United States, today applauded the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases (AASLD) and the Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA) for updating their hepatitis C virus (HCV) screening and treatment recommendations to focus on eradicating HCV among key populations. The new guidelines focus on groups most at-risk for HCV, including pregnant women who previously were not regularly screened, people who inject drugs, men who have sex with men and individuals who are incarcerated.

"The emergent opioid crisis, persistent stigma around hepatitis C, and discriminatory treatment restrictions have allowed HCV to go unchecked among vulnerable populations, even as a cure exists," said Tina Broder, Interim Executive Director of NVHR. "AASLD and IDSA are the preeminent organizations guiding clinical practice for HCV screening and treatment and their recommendations send a clear signal that increased screening and access to treatment are critical for eliminating hepatitis C as a public health threat."

At least 3.5 million Americans are infected with hepatitis C, an epidemic that has eclipsed all other infectious diseases in the U.S. Despite HCV medications that are approximately 95 percent effective at curing individuals who are undergoing treatment, many states continue to impose discriminatory restrictions on hepatitis C treatment through sobriety requirements as well as disease severity and specialist requirements. Last year, NVHR and the Center for Health Law and Policy Innovation of Harvard Law School (CHLPI) published "Hepatitis C: The State of Medicaid Access," which illustrated the ways in which treatment restrictions keep Americans from being cured and prevent the elimination of the HCV epidemic.

"Discriminatory treatment restrictions impose significant barriers on the individuals at the center of this new wave of hepatitis C infections and interfere with our ability to mount an appropriate public health response to treat hepatitis C and prevent further infections," said Dr. Robert Gish,

NVHR Vice-Chair. “NVHR believes that all people deserve access to treatment for hepatitis C and we have consistently advocated for the removal of treatment restrictions and systematic barriers to care.”

The AASLD/IDSA recommendations emphasize the importance of testing key populations and treating virtually all patients with the virus. There has been a sharp increase in the incidence of HCV-infected women giving birth in the U.S. between 2011-2014. Since 2000, there have been several outbreaks of sexually transmitted HCV among men who have sex with men. The opioid epidemic has led to a surge in the number of HCV cases among those who inject drugs. And research has shown that hepatitis C disproportionately affects people in correctional institutions.

“NVHR applauds the new AASLD/IDSA guidance, which recognizes that we must stop stigmatizing those living with hepatitis C and instead start offering HCV testing and treatment,” said Dr. Stacey Trooskin, NVHR Medical Advisor. “Injection drug use is the most common risk factor for HCV infection. Hepatitis C is prevalent in correctional settings, but screening and treatment are often lacking. Expanding testing and treatment for these populations is logical and necessary.”

“These recommendations reflect what we in the trenches have known for years: those who are at greatest risk for acquiring hepatitis C should be screened regularly and have access to treatment,” said Heather Lusk, Acting Chair of NVHR and Director of Hawaii’s statewide syringe access program. “We do not lack the public health tools to address this crisis and eliminate hepatitis in our country. Rather, we lack the necessary commitment from government and payers, as a result of policies driven by stigma, not science. Stigma can no longer be a barrier to addressing hepatitis C.”

To read the full updated recommendations from AALSD and IDSA click here.

To read the full “Hepatitis C: State of Medicaid Access” report, click here.

About the National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable (NVHR)
The National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable is a national coalition working together to eliminate hepatitis B and C in the United States. NVHR’s vision is a healthier world without hepatitis B and C. NVHR’s work is guided and informed by our beliefs and commitment to: Participation, Inclusiveness, Intersectionality, Health Equity, and Stigma Elimination. For more information, visit www.nvhr.org.

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