Spotlight on Viral Hepatitis State Advocates: Emalie Huriaux

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In the field of viral hepatitis, the importance of state level advocacy has become commensurate with federal level advocacy. With the myriad of organizations and individuals working in concert, coalition work has emerged as an effective mechanism to engage in state level advocacy, galvanizing diverse groups of people toward a common goal.

Throughout 2016, we have seen the efficacy of coalition advocacy as Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Florida, New York, Delaware, and Washington have begun to walk back restrictions on hepatitis C treatment access in their Medicaid programs.

The energy is no different in California, home to coalition and campaign powerhouses like the California Hepatitis Alliance (CalHEP), San Francisco Hep B Free, and the San Francisco Hepatitis C Task Force. In the throes of these advocacy efforts are prominent advocates like Emalie Huriaux.

As Director of State and Federal Affairs at Project Inform in California and the Chair of the California Hepatitis Alliance (CalHEP), Huriaux engages in coalition work in California through Project Inform and CalHEP and nationally as the chair of the National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable (NVHR) Steering Committee.

Like many others, Huriaux's migration into her current roles represents a clear consolidation of interests that led her to the niche field of viral hepatitis advocacy. Through a collegiate interest in reproductive health and women's health issues, Huriaux went to work for a street outreach program for women in San Francisco. One of the many challenges facing the women she encountered drug-related health issues and the criminalization of drug use. Later, Huriaux solidified her interests in drug policy, harm reduction, HIV, and hepatitis C with a Master's Degree in Public Health.

Upon completing her graduate degree, Huriaux went on to run the DOPE Project, an overdose prevention and naloxone distribution program in the San Francisco Bay Area, where she expanded her work in harm reduction program capacity-building efforts and the intersection of these efforts with HIV and hepatitis C issues.

After a seven-year stint at the San Francisco Department of Public Health, working as the HIV Set-Aside and Viral Hepatitis Integration Coordinator, Huriaux took her current position at Project

Inform, a perfect alignment of her interests in policy and advocacy, while also allowing her to work with programs around the state through CalHEP.

Looking back, Huriaux's seemingly disparate interests produced common threads that led her to her current roles.

"I think it was the social justice issues in women's health that introduced me to everything," she said. "The layer of stigma and morality imposed on people I worked with in sexual health and drug user health really overlapped."

Huriaux wasted neither time nor energy when she transitioned from direct public health work to policy. One of her many projects includes increasing access to hepatitis C treatment in Medi-Cal (California's state Medicaid program) and advocating for state general funds for hepatitis services.

When asked about her most rewarding advocacy experiences, Huriaux drew on two memories. The first came while running the DOPE Project, where Huriaux galvanized advocates and secured a large contract with the county that created ongoing grant funding for overdose prevention and naloxone into the city budget. Since Huriaux's accomplishment and even after her departure, the support from the city has continued and increased, ensuring the program's success and sustainability.

The second accomplishment was similar in nature, yet larger in scale. For fiscal years 2015-2015 and 2016-2017, Huriaux worked with CalHEP to successfully advocate for state general funds to support the purchase of rapid hepatitis C antibody test kits, the purchase of hepatitis B vaccine to vaccinate adults, increase the HIV and hepatitis C testing counselor training program, technical assistance to increase syringe access in the state, the creation of a statewide syringe exchange and disposal supply clearinghouse, and the establishment of hepatitis C linkage to and retention in care demonstration projects. These efforts increase hepatitis prevention capacity in the state of California and connect people living with hepatitis C to curative treatment.

Like many others, Huriaux harnessed the power of her strengths in combination with effective coalitions to secure funding for viral hepatitis work, a critical step in working to prevent and ultimately eliminate hepatitis B and C in the United States.

Interested in learning how to form or join a coalition? NVHR recently revamped one of our program pages, Community Partner Activities, which includes a list of viral hepatitis coalitions throughout the country, as well as coalition-building resources to support advocates form a coalition, select members, define key elements, maintain sustainability, and conduct ongoing evaluations.

It is undeniable that our work in viral hepatitis would be weakened without the efforts of advocates like Emalie Huriaux and others involved in coalition work. Stay connected with us to learn more about the work of effective state advocates!

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Emily Stets is the Program and Policy Associate at the National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable (NVHR), a national coalition dedicated to ending the hepatitis B and C epidemics in the United States.

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