

Support Funding to Combat Viral Hepatitis and Eliminate Opioid-related Infectious Diseases

Sending Office: Honorable Grace Meng
Sent By: Jacqueline.Hsieh@mail.house.gov

Request for Signature(s)

Support Funding to Combat Viral Hepatitis and Eliminate Opioid-related Infectious Diseases

DEADLINE: COB March 26, 2019

****This includes two programmatic requests****

Dear Colleague,

For FY2020, we urge you to join us in requesting the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee to increase the funding for viral hepatitis programs at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to \$134 million, and include at least \$58 million to fully fund the recently passed program to eliminate opioid-related infectious diseases.

The CDC's Division of Viral Hepatitis is significantly underfunded and needs an infusion of dedicated resources to strengthen the nation's public health infrastructure to assist in the response of infectious diseases caused by the opioid crisis. The explosion of opioid use in the United States has led to increasing infection rates of Hepatitis B virus (HBV) and Hepatitis C virus (HCV). There are nearly 5.3 million people living with HBV and HCV, with more than 50 percent who are unaware of their infection. HBV and HCV are completely preventable, but require greater resources to prevent more cases and cure infected patients.

Funding for the Division of Viral Hepatitis has not been sufficient enough to address the growth of HBV and HCV in the United States. Now is the time to fund CDC's Division of Viral Hepatitis to address this public health challenge.

We urge you to support additional funding to combat viral hepatitis and eliminate opioid-related infectious diseases by signing onto this letter to the LHHS Subcommittee. If you would like to add your name to this letter, please contact Jacqueline Hsieh in Rep. Meng's office at Jacqueline.Hsieh@mail.house.gov, or Chelsea Grey in Rep. Johnson's office at Chelsea.Grey@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,

Grace Meng
Member of Congress

Hank Johnson
Member of Congress

March xx, 2019

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health
and Human Services, Education,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health
and Human Services, Education,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman DeLauro and Ranking Member Cole:

As you begin deliberations on the Fiscal Year 2020 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, we respectfully urge you to increase funds for the viral hepatitis programs at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to \$134 million and include at least \$58 million to fully fund the recently passed program to eliminate opioid-related infectious diseases.

New cases of viral hepatitis have skyrocketed in communities across the country. The CDC estimates that up to 5.3 million people in the United States live with hepatitis B (HBV) or hepatitis C (HCV), with more than half unaware they are living with the disease. Between 2010 and 2016, new cases of HCV rose by a staggering 350 percent nationwide. It is estimated that more than 70 percent of those cases are a direct result of injection drug use, which has increased as a result of the opioid crisis. In addition, we are at a critical time for HBV, where little to no progress has been made to reduce the number of chronic HBV cases, despite HBV being a vaccine preventable disease. The number of reported acute HBV cases across the country rose for the first time since 2006, increasing by 20.7 percent in 2015, largely due to the opioid crisis and low adult vaccination rates. HBV and HCV remain the leading causes of liver cancer – one of the most lethal, most expensive to battle, and fastest growing cancers in America, with 5-year survival rates of only 20 percent.

The tools to reverse these trends and eliminate viral hepatitis in the United States exist. Due to advances in medical science, there is now a highly effective treatment for HCV that can cure the disease in as little as eight weeks. There are also highly effective vaccines for infants, children, and adults that protect against HBV.

Reaching elimination will require an investment in resources, especially at the CDC. According to a December 2016 professional judgment budget, a comprehensive national viral hepatitis program putting the U.S. on a path towards elimination requires approximately \$3.9 billion over 10 years. This is well above the Division's current funding level of only \$39 million. Prioritizing funding for viral hepatitis programs will allow the agency to build the infrastructure and programs necessary to identify people living with viral hepatitis and link them to care and treatment, work with providers, health care professionals and insurers to improve access to screening and treatment, improve surveillance and outbreak response, prevent mother-to-child transmission of HBV and HCV, and improve prevention efforts through research and technical assistance. The ability to provide state and local health departments and other key stakeholders funding to build the necessary infrastructure to provide services is integral to stopping the spread of this disease. We urge the Committee to allocate no less than \$134 million in funding for the CDC's viral hepatitis programs in FY2020.

Further combatting injection drug use and the opioid crisis is another key step in preventing new cases of viral hepatitis and putting the country on the path towards elimination. The SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act, the bipartisan bill signed into law in October 2018 by President Trump, includes many impactful and important solutions that can be used to combat the ongoing opioid crisis. One of these is Section 7141, Reauthorization and Expansion of Program of Surveillance and Education Regarding Infections Associated with Illicit Drug Use. This authorizes funding for the CDC to provide much-needed resources to state and local governments and others to help improve the response to the infectious disease consequences of the opioid crisis. These resources would be used for surveillance, testing, and to link individuals to care and treatment of the infectious

diseases most exacerbated by the opioid crisis – including viral hepatitis – along with expanding prevention and education efforts. We urge the Committee to fully fund this program to eliminate opioid-related infectious diseases at no less than \$58 million.

Funding for this new program must not come at the expense of existing viral hepatitis and other critical healthcare programs, nor be a substitute for additional funding for the Division.

We appreciate your committee's commitment to combating the opioid crisis and for its support for viral hepatitis prevention. Making this investment in CDC viral hepatitis programs and funding the program to eliminate opioid-related infectious diseases are essential to strengthening our public health infrastructure and addressing the devastating ongoing viral hepatitis epidemics.

Sincerely,

Related Legislative Issues

Selected legislative information: Appropriations, HealthCare