



National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable

Observes World Hepatitis Day and Calls for Increased Federal Action

Greater Investments in Public Health a Must

Federal Leadership Needed to Focus Policy Actions at the Federal Level

WASHINGTON, D.C. (May 19, 2009) – Today, on the second annual World Hepatitis Day, more than 200 viral hepatitis groups around the world have planned observances to raise global awareness, and calling for international and national support for improvements in prevention, diagnosis, treatment and support for people living with chronic viral hepatitis B and C.

In the United States, where the need for awareness is especially urgent, the National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable (NVHR) today called on the federal government to take action to improve its response to the hepatitis B and C epidemics in the United States.

Viral hepatitis afflicts more than five million Americans, making an undeniable case for investment in screening and treatment today to prevent a catastrophe tomorrow. Chronic viral hepatitis is the leading cause of primary liver cancer, which is one of the fastest growing cancers in the U.S. and the 8th leading cause of cancer death in Caucasians and the 3rd leading cause of cancer deaths in Asian Americans.

An actuarial analysis released yesterday found that 78% of Americans with hepatitis C do not know they carry the virus. The cost of advanced liver disease in HCV-infected patients will skyrocket 250 percent from today, reaching \$85 billion in the next two decades without changes in how these patients are diagnosed and treated. (The report is available at: <http://www.milliman.com/expertise/healthcare/publications/rr/consequences-hepatitis-c-virus-RR05-15-09.php>) This shocking finding highlights the need for increased governmental leadership to protect the health of Americans. Left unchecked, the astronomical cost of care for end stage liver disease in our aging population will threaten President Obama's health-care reform plans.

While the situation is serious, Congress and the Administration can take concrete steps to avert a worst-case scenario. But action is needed urgently. There are two things the federal government can do immediately to address the situation.

First, increase funds for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, from its current level of \$18.3 million to \$50 million annually. CDC's Division of Viral Hepatitis is funded at \$18,316,000 for FY 2009, which represents approximately 2% of the budget of the CDC's National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, Sexually Transmitted Diseases, and TB Prevention. States receive an average of \$90,000 to support adult viral hepatitis prevention. This provides for little more than one staff position for an entire state, and no services.

Second, appoint a senior member of the staff of the Secretary of Health and Human Services to focus on coordination of viral hepatitis efforts across federal agencies. This would include ensuring screening programs are available nationwide and care and support programs are available for persons living with chronic viral hepatitis. This position would also serve as a resource to ensure viral hepatitis needs are adequately included in the details of the Administration's health care reform package. Currently, there is no federally funded hepatitis awareness campaign, hepatitis B or C counseling and testing program, chronic hepatitis surveillance system, adult hepatitis A and B vaccination program, linkage to care system for persons infected with hepatitis B or C, or treatment program for un/underinsured Americans.

"Increased funding through the CDC and other federal health agencies can ease the economic and health-related burdens of viral hepatitis," said Chris Taylor, chairman of the NVHR. "Individuals that receive screening for viral hepatitis can be medically evaluated and counseled or treated to reduce the onset of the most severe complications of the disease, and can prevent transmitting infection to others."

About NVHR

The National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable (www.nvhr.org) is a coalition of public, private, and voluntary organizations dedicated to reducing the incidence of infection, morbidity, and mortality from viral hepatitis in the United States

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The report, **Consequences of Hepatitis C Virus (HCV): A Baby Boomer Epidemic of Liver Disease**, is available: [<http://www.milliman.com/expertise/healthcare/publications/rr/consequences-hepatitis-c-virus-RR05-15-09.php>]

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