

## **ACTION ALERT**

### **URGE YOUR MEMBERS OF CONGRESS TO FUND HEPATITIS C PREVENTION IN THEIR APPROPRIATIONS REQUEST LETTERS**

Earlier this month, President Bush started the Fiscal Year 2007 appropriations process with the release of his budget proposal. The President's Budget does not include language regarding increases for hepatitis C prevention at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Division of Viral Hepatitis (DVH). Silence on this issue will result in further cuts to an already small hepatitis C (HCV) allocation of \$17.5 million at DVH. **A small increase of \$10 million can make a big difference.**

In the next few weeks, all Senators and Representatives will write their "programmatic appropriations request letters," which asks members of the Appropriations Subcommittees (who put together the federal funding legislation) to support funding for their priorities. These letters play a crucial role in educating key lawmakers about the importance of hepatitis-related public health programs.

The first thing you can do this year to fight for HCV funding is to contact your elected representatives and ask them to include funds for hepatitis C prevention programs in their programmatic appropriations request letter. Please take a few minutes to make these important phone calls! We can do this. Our request is reasonable. The infrastructure exists for the funds to be distributed and spent wisely by our state Hepatitis C coordinators. We can make an impact, but only with action from you.

#### **How you can help:**

**How:** Contact your Senators and Representative today! We have about a week left to educate House Appropriators about the inadequate funding for hepatitis C programs. Whether you speak to this person live or leave a message, tell them:

"My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I live in City/State. I am calling to urge Representative/Senator \_\_\_\_\_ to include funding for hepatitis C in his/her Fiscal Year 2007 appropriations request letter. Below is sample language that your representatives can use when writing their request letters. **OFFER TO EMAIL OR FAX IT TO THE STAFF PERSON.**

**When:** Right now! Members of Congress need to hear from you by **March 9** for your U.S. Representatives and by **March 31** for your two U.S. Senators.

## **Sample Language:**

### FY07 Appropriations Request for Hepatitis C

Mr. Chairman, as your Subcommittee begins work on the Fiscal Year 2007 appropriations bill for Labor/HHS/Education, I want to call your attention to the very real needs of Americans living with hepatitis C. An estimated **3 to 5 million Americans** have been infected with the hepatitis C virus (HCV) making it the most common, chronic, blood-borne disease in the United States. At least 2.7 million people in the U.S. are chronically infected with HCV. Many people with chronic hepatitis C are unaware that they are infected because HCV is often asymptomatic until advanced liver damage develops. I respectfully request that you include the following language in your programmatic appropriations requests:

#### **CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION (CDC)**

**Hepatitis** – The Committee is concerned that an estimated 75% of the 3 to 5 million Americans with hepatitis C are unaware of their condition, and therefore urges a campaign of public announcements in collaboration with national health organizations for appropriate screening and medical follow-up of target populations. The Committee also recognizes increasing rates of hepatitis A and B infections among select adult populations, and the alarming rate HIV/HCV coinfection. The Committee includes in the appropriation a \$10 million increase to specifically support the implementation the *National Hepatitis C Prevention Strategy*. The Committee urges that this funding be used by CDC/DCH to expand the capability of state health departments, especially to enhance resources available to hepatitis C state coordinators and to expand HCV screening initiatives.

#### **HEALTH RESOURCES AND SERVICES ADMINISTRATION (HRSA)**

##### **Bureau of Primary Health Care**

**Consolidated Health Centers** – The committee recognizes the important role of the consolidated health centers in caring for people living with or at risk for hepatitis C. The committee encourages the Bureau of Primary Care to increase health centers' capacity for delivery of medical management and treatment of HCV by implementing training and technical assistance initiatives, so that health centers are able to increase hepatitis C counseling and testing, and medical management and treatment services to meet the healthcare priorities of their respective communities.

##### **HIV/AIDS Bureau**

**Ryan White CARE Act** – The Committee is concerned that at least 25% of persons living with HIV are coinfecting with HCV, and that HCV-related complications are the leading cause of death among persons with HIV/AIDS. The Committee requests that HRSA provide more guidance to grantees on providing services to coinfecting individuals, and more education and training to medical providers treating HIV/HCV coinfecting persons.

## **NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH (NIH)**

### **National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK)**

*Action Plan for Liver Disease Research* –The Committee is pleased that NIDDK, in collaboration with leading scientific experts, has prepared and published a comprehensive *Action Plan for Liver Disease Research*. The Committee urges that steps be taken to implement the plan immediately and submit a report to the Committee prior to next year’s hearings detailing accomplishments to date and future plans with a specific timeline for implementation of the balance of the plan.

### **National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)**

*Hepatitis* – The Committee urges NIMH to conduct and/or facilitate research to explore the etiology and effective therapeutic management of neuropsychiatric symptoms and disorders associated with chronic hepatitis C and interferon-based antiviral treatment.

## **SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ADMINISTRATION (SAMHSA)**

### **Center for Substance Abuse Treatment**

*Hepatitis* – The Committee recognizes that states receiving HIV set-aside funds within their Substance Abuse Prevention block grants are well positioned to offer viral hepatitis prevention services to high risk clients, and encourages set-aside dollars to be used to support such activities. The Committee recognizes that most new HCV infections are related to drug use and asks SAMHSA to encourage all grantees to incorporate viral hepatitis prevention services such as hepatitis C screening into existing drug treatment programs.