95 Advocacy Groups Urge Congress to Address the Infectious Disease Consequences of the Opioid Crisis

Experts are calling for an additional $100 million to fund the CDC's Viral Hepatitis programs.

March 2, 2018 By Casey Halter

In the midst of America's ongoing opioid crisis, 95 hepatitis, HIV and other health-related advocacy organizations have teamed up to urge Congress to increase funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s viral hepatitis programs by $100 million, according to a recent press release from AIDS United.

In letters sent this week to the House and Senate, advocates detailed how addiction to heroin and prescription painkillers is fueling new cases of several infectious diseases, including hepatitis C virus (HCV), hepatitis B virus (HBV) and HIV. The letters also argue that a significant investment is key to helping state and community-based public health organizations combat the rise in new infections.

Below are some of the troubling statistics cited in the call for action:

- Between 2010 and 2015, new cases of hepatitis C increased by 290 percent across the country.
- An estimated 70 percent of those new cases were a direct result of injection drug use.
- Admissions to drug admissions for patients who inject opioids increased by 93 percent.
- Significant increases in hepatitis B– and injection-drug-use-related HIV are also on the rise.

Advocates also note that during fiscal year 2017, the CDC's viral hepatitis programs received only $34 million, which they deemed insufficient for responding to the crisis. According to the organizations, increasing that funding to $134 million would enable the CDC to dramatically escalate education, testing and linkage to care in at-risk communities as well as help ramp up the viral hepatitis surveillance infrastructure necessary to accurately track the epidemics.

"These programs are the first line of defense for reducing infectious disease risk and increasing overdose prevention efforts and linkage to substance use disorder treatment and recovery. These programs need additional resources, though, if we want them to reach their full potential," said

Daniel Raymond, the Harm Reduction Coalition’s deputy director of planning and policy, which signed on to the initiative.

Other supporting organizations include NASTAD and the AIDS Institute.

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