



15 June 2015

The Honorable Fred Upton  
United States House of Representatives  
Chairman, Energy and Commerce Committee  
2183 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Frank Pallone  
United States House of Representatives  
Ranking Member, Energy and Commerce Committee  
237 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Robert Goodlatte  
United States House of Representatives  
Chairman, Judiciary Committee  
2309 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Conyers  
United States House of Representatives  
Ranking Member, Judiciary Committee  
2426 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Support for H.R.2536, the “Recovery Enhancement for Addiction Treatment Act” or “TREAT Act”

Dear Chairmen Upton and Goodlatte and Ranking Members Pallone and Conyers:

On behalf of the National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable (NVHR), a national coalition of over 250 organizations working to fight, and ultimately end, the hepatitis B and C epidemics, we are writing to express our support for H.R.2536 – the TREAT Act – introduced by Representatives Higgins, Hanna, Tonko, and Katko. H.R.2536 provides for increased access to medication-assisted therapy (MAT) for opioid-dependent persons, also serving a vital role in stemming the tide of a resurgent hepatitis C epidemic.

Hepatitis C is a communicable, chronic, life-threatening virus affecting approximately 3.9 million Americans. Often asymptomatic, the virus can take decades to eventually manifest as cirrhosis, end-stage liver disease, and liver cancer – all very costly for the healthcare system. Despite updated U.S. Preventive Services Task Force testing recommendations and the availability of effective curative treatment, up to 75% of those living with hepatitis C do not know their status. In the United States, injection drug use poses the highest risk for infection, and there is a close connection between the opioid crisis and the alarming rise in hepatitis C infection.

Localized outbreaks – like those highlighted by the media in recent months in Indiana and Kentucky – reflect a national emergent epidemic. From 2010-2013, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) saw a 151% increase in incidence of hepatitis C. Those affected are primarily young (under 30 years of age) and living in rural or suburban areas, with men and women experiencing similar rates of infection. CDC reports that cases are overwhelmingly preceded by misuse of oral prescription opioids followed by initiation of injection, with many individuals eventually switching to heroin, a less expensive but equally effective alternative. Alarming, these youth often become infected with hepatitis C within two years of transitioning to injecting.

Medication-assisted therapy is a critical tool to address opioid addiction as well as rising hepatitis C infection, as it plays an important role in reducing and/or eliminating injecting behavior – the primary mode of transmission for hepatitis C. Unfortunately, current addiction treatment options remain inadequate to meet community needs; expanded access to MAT is vital to prevent further illness and death due to chronic hepatitis C and/or HIV infection and overdose. A recent Scottish study regarding a country-wide harm reduction initiative showed that high coverage of MAT, combined with sterile syringe access, effectively reduces hepatitis C incidence. The



TREAT Act is a significant step toward achieving that outcome here in the United States, a key aim of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services *2014-2016 Action Plan for the Prevention, Care, & Treatment of Viral Hepatitis*.

Unfettered access to treatment for opioid- and heroin-addicted persons is a necessary component of hepatitis C prevention, and medication-assisted therapy has a well-established record of effectiveness. By reducing barriers to providers offering this care, the TREAT Act offers desperately-needed support for communities nationwide struggling with addiction and at risk for chronic and life-threatening illnesses.

NVHR thanks you for your leadership, and urges all Members of the House to support H.R.2536, the Recovery Enhancement for Addiction Treatment (TREAT) Act. We also urge the House Energy and Commerce Committee and House Judiciary Committee to hold a markup of this bill with the urgency these epidemics merit.

If you have any questions, or would like additional information about hepatitis C, please do not hesitate to contact Christine Rodriguez at the email or number below.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ryan Clary".

Ryan Clary  
Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christine Rodriguez".

Christine Rodriguez  
Public Policy Manager  
[crodriguez@nvhr.org](mailto:crodriguez@nvhr.org)  
(202) 408-4848, x221

cc: House of Representatives Energy and Commerce Committee Members  
House of Representatives Judiciary Committee Members  
House of Representatives Co-Sponsors of H.R.2536