



November 18, 2015

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Harold Rogers
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Urgent Need for Increased FY2016 Viral Hepatitis Appropriations

Dear Chairmen Cochran and Rogers, and Ranking Members Mikulski and Lowey:

On behalf of our over 300 public, private, and voluntary organizational members nationwide, the National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable (NVHR) would like to again thank you for the swift and decisive passage of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015. As Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 appropriations bills are finalized, we again call on your leadership and commitment to improving the lives of all Americans, and **strongly urge the highest possible funding level for the Division of Viral Hepatitis (DVH) at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) within the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (LHHS) bill. Specifically, we ask that DVH be funded at the full \$62.8 million level in FY2016 as requested by the Administration and community advocates.**

We would also like to again express our appreciation for maintained funding in the House bill and the \$5 million increase in the Senate bill for DVH – the only agency dedicated entirely to combating all five hepatitises (hepatitis A, B, C, D and E), domestically and globally – in this challenging fiscal climate. We were also very gratified to see modified language included in both drafts loosening the restriction on use of federal funds for syringe services programs; it is critical to hepatitis B and C prevention efforts that this language be maintained.

However, the viral hepatitis community is in the unenviable position of combating epidemics that not only represent the most common transmissible infections in the United States, but for which rates are also increasing, with tremendously meager funds. **The \$31.3 million appropriated for DVH since FY2012 is simply inadequate to address the needs of the approximately 2 million Americans living with chronic hepatitis B, and nearly 4 million Americans living with chronic hepatitis C.** As you may also know, CDC's most recent surveillance report detected the first increase in new hepatitis B cases since 1990 – a distressing finding that must be addressed with urgency. Further, communities across the national are grappling with explosive increases in hepatitis C, primarily among young people under 30 who inject drugs, and who largely live in rural and suburban areas that are less well equipped to address these outbreaks.

Investment in DVH at this time is critical given that up to 75% of those living with hepatitis B and/or C are unaware of their infection, and these chronic, communicable, and potentially life-threatening infections collectively drive the nation's liver cancer and liver transplantation rates. Demonstrating the gravity of the state of the hepatitis C epidemic alone, recent data released by CDC indicate that **in 2012 the number of deaths from hepatitis C surpassed those attributable to all other nationally notifiable infectious diseases combined.**

This is a staggering and disturbing trend, and one that we have a responsibility to address in a truly meaningful way. Given

adequate resources, we even have the opportunity eliminate these epidemics in the United States with preventive interventions such as opioid substitution therapy, syringe services, and a safe and effective vaccine for hepatitis B; antiviral treatment for hepatitis B; and revolutionary new curative treatment for hepatitis C.

Again, we thank Members of both the House and Senate Appropriations Committees for a demonstrated commitment to our community by maintaining funding for CDC's DVH in draft FY2016 bills, and for loosening restrictions on essential federal funding to support sustainable and comprehensive syringe services programs. **We urge in the strongest possible terms that the Division of Viral Hepatitis at CDC be funded at the full \$62.8 million requested, or at the highest possible level, in order to begin catching up to the viral hepatitis epidemics that are silently ending millions of Americans lives.**

We look forward to continuing our work with you on FY2016 appropriations and beyond; please do not hesitate to contact Christine Rodriguez at crodriguez@nvhr.org or 703-945-9698 with any questions.

Sincerely,



Christine Rodriguez
Senior Policy Manager
National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable

cc:

Members, Senate Committee on Appropriations
Members, House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations

