



March 19, 2018

The Honorable Greg Walden, Chairman, House Energy & Commerce Committee  
The Honorable Michael C. Burgess, Chairman, Health Subcommittee

**RE: H.R. \_\_, Eliminating Opioid-Related Infectious Diseases Act**

The National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable (NVHR) is a broad coalition of 500 organizations working to end the hepatitis B and C epidemics in the United States. On behalf of the nearly 5 million people living with hepatitis B or C, we appreciate this opportunity to express support for H.R. \_\_, the Eliminating Opioid-Related Infectious Diseases Act.

Skyrocketing rates of infection with hepatitis C and hepatitis B are among the devastating public health consequences of the opioid crisis in the United States. Hepatitis C is the deadliest infectious disease in America, killing nearly 20,000 people in 2014 alone,<sup>1</sup> and injection drug use is the cause of most new infections.<sup>2</sup> From 2010 to 2015, the number of new hepatitis C infections jumped by 294 percent, with particularly sharp increases among states hardest hit by the opioid crisis.<sup>3</sup> Reported cases of hepatitis B, which can also be transmitted via injection drug use, increased 20.7 percent in 2015.<sup>4</sup> Because of the direct link between injectable opioid use and hepatitis C and B, any initiative to tackle the opioid crisis in America must include a robust effort to screen, vaccinate, and treat people for these viruses.

The underfunding of surveillance and testing programs for hepatitis B and C has contributed in part to the explosion of these epidemics. By steering funding toward the prevention of infectious diseases spread by injection drug use, the Eliminating Opioid-Related Infectious Diseases Act of 2018 would take a step in the right direction. Even a modest increase in funding would ensure that more people are tested and linked to care for hepatitis B and C, preventing more infections and saving countless lives. NVHR strongly supports the Eliminating Opioid-Related Infectious Diseases Act because it would allocate badly needed resources to the fight against hepatitis B and C. We urge the Committee to begin addressing these epidemics with its approval of this legislation today.

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Hepatitis C Kills More Americans than Any Other Infectious Disease" (May 2016), available at <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2016/p0504-hepc-mortality.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Campbell, Canary, Smith, et al. State HCV Incidence and Policies Related to HCV Preventive and Treatment Services for Persons Who Inject Drugs — United States, 2015–2016. *MMWR MORB MORTAL WKLY REP* 2017;66:1-2.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Surveillance for Viral Hepatitis – United States, 2015" (June 2017), available at <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/statistics/2015surveillance/commentary.htm>.

Respectfully submitted by,

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