



## **NVHR Urges Congress to Pass the Eliminating Opioid-Related Infectious Diseases Act**

### ***Bill Would Increase Funding to Fight Infectious Diseases Like Hepatitis B and C***

#### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Washington, DC (March 27, 2018) - The National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable (NVHR) today called for immediate passage of the Eliminating Opioid-Related Infectious Diseases Act, a bill that would increase funding for fighting infectious diseases like hepatitis B and C.

Congressman Leonard Lance (R-NJ) and Joseph P. Kennedy III (D-MA) introduced the bipartisan legislation (H.R. 5353) on March 20, 2018. A Senate companion bill (S. 2579) has been introduced by Senators Todd Young (R-IN) and Edward J. Markey (D-MA). The Eliminating Opioid-Related Infectious Diseases Act would expand surveillance and education about infections associated with injection drug use. The bill would appropriate \$40 million for the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention to implement programs that address the high rates of infectious diseases such as hepatitis B and C, which have been dangerously on the rise because of the opioid crisis.

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>

The underfunding of surveillance and testing programs for hepatitis B and C has contributed in part to the explosion of these epidemics. “Even a modest increase in funding would help

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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>.

communities hard-hit by the opioid crisis and suffering from high rates of hepatitis B and C,” said Elizabeth Paukstis, NVHR’s Public Policy Director. “The Eliminating Opioid-Related Infectious Diseases Act would take a step in the right direction by allocating desperately needed funding toward the prevention of these devastating diseases.”

“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, provide hepatitis B vaccination, and treat people for hepatitis B and C,” said Dr. Stacey Trooskin, Director of Viral Hepatitis Programs at Philadelphia FIGHT Community Health Centers. “We cannot afford to ignore the tragic public health consequence of this crisis any longer. The Eliminating Opioid-Related Infectious Diseases Act is commonsense legislation that should be passed and enacted without delay.”

**About NVHR:** The National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable (NVHR) is a national coalition working together to eliminate hepatitis B and C in the United States. NVHR’s vision is a healthier world without hepatitis B and C.

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