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Louisiana Receives ‘F’ in New Harvard Law School & NVHR Report Card Project Grading Medicaid Programs for Discriminatory Hepatitis C Treatment Restrictions

LA is One of Just Five States to Receive an ‘F’ in ‘Hepatitis C: State of Medicaid Access,’ Which Grades 52 Medicaid Programs & Offers Recommendations to Improve

Dec. 11, 2017 – The [National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable](#) (NVHR) and the [Center for Health Law and Policy Innovation of Harvard Law School](#) (CHLPI) gave Louisiana an “F” in its new report and interactive project, [Hepatitis C: State of Medicaid Access](#), which grades all 50 state Medicaid programs, as well as the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, according to access to curative treatments for hepatitis C, the nation’s deadliest infectious disease.

Louisiana is one of five Medicaid programs that received an “F” for imposing discriminatory restrictions on hepatitis C cures. Specifically, Louisiana’s Fee-For-Service (FFS) Program requires hepatitis C patients to demonstrate severe liver damage (a fibrosis score of F3 or greater), 12 months of sobriety, and a prescription from a specialist – who can be costly and difficult to find – before receiving access to treatment. Coverage requirements in most Managed Care Organizations (MCO) are also highly restrictive. Notably, these restrictions are still in place despite [news](#) that Louisiana Medicaid is running under-budget this year.

“More than 75,000 Louisianans are living with hepatitis C, which now kills more Americans each year than all other infectious diseases combined,” said Ryan Clary, executive director of NVHR. “Ensuring Medicaid recipients have access to treatment is a critical step towards ending this devastating virus, making it even more baffling that Louisiana would withhold a cure from patients when it has unspent Medicaid resources. Our hope with this project is for states with failing grades like Louisiana to see how they compare and take steps to connect all hepatitis C patients with a cure.”

“This report confirms what those of us living in Louisiana already know, that the state is one of the worst offenders in restricting access to a cure for hepatitis C, especially in terms of sobriety requirements,” said Jason Halperin, M.D., infectious disease physician with CrescentCare. “We hope this report provides the evidence needed to support our ability to align with state decisionmakers and remove restrictions to life-saving hepatitis C care for patients in our Medicaid program.”

Robert Greenwald, Clinical Professor of Law at Harvard Law School and the director of CHLPI, added, “We know that hepatitis C infections are increasing as a result of the opioid crisis, yet Louisiana is barring patients who have used drugs in the past year, the population most likely to spread this highly communicable disease, from accessing a cure. To address this problem, many Medicaid programs have removed discriminatory hepatitis C treatment restrictions. It’s time for Louisiana to follow suit.”

Hepatitis C: State of Medicaid Access – which is available online in interactive form at <http://stateofhepc.org> – grades each state, as well as the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, according to its overall “state of access.” Each grade is determined by curative treatment restrictions related to three areas: 1) liver disease progression (fibrosis) restrictions, 2) sobriety/substance use

requirements, and 3) prescriber limitations – all of which contradict [guidance](#) from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), as well as [recommendations](#) from AASLD and the Infectious Disease Society of America. The report also offers suggestions for each state to reduce its treatment access requirements.

States that received an “A” are: Alaska, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Nevada, and Washington. States that received an “F” are: Arkansas, Louisiana, Montana, Oregon, and South Dakota. Most states – 21 and Puerto Rico – received a “D.”

Read the full Louisiana report card [here](#).

About CrescentCare

CrescentCare is a community health center that offers a full spectrum of quality care at low to no cost to the entire community with or without insurance. Our services include: primary medical care, dental services, behavioral health, Medicaid and other health coverage enrollment, case management and support services such as a food pantry, home delivered meals, housing, peer support, legal services, HIV and sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing, PrEP, and other prevention services. CrescentCare is committed to the health of our entire community. We serve more than 9,000 people each year with medical care and over 30,000 through HIV and STI prevention education efforts.

About the National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable (NVHR)

The National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable is a broad coalition working to fight, and ultimately end, the hepatitis B and hepatitis C epidemics. We seek an aggressive response from policymakers, public health officials, medical and health care providers, the media, and the general public through our advocacy, education, and technical assistance. NVHR believes an end to the hepatitis B and C epidemics is within our reach and can be achieved through addressing stigma and health disparities, removing barriers to prevention, care and treatment, and ensuring respect and compassion for all affected communities. For more information, visit www.nvhr.org.

About the Center for Health Law and Policy Innovation of Harvard Law School (CHLPI)

The Center for Health Law and Policy Innovation of Harvard Law School (CHLPI) advocates for legal, regulatory, and policy reforms to improve the health of underserved populations, with a focus on the needs of low-income people living with chronic illnesses and disabilities. CHLPI works with consumers, advocates, community-based organizations, health and social services professionals, government officials, and others to expand access to high-quality healthcare; to reduce health disparities; to develop community advocacy capacity; and to promote more equitable and effective healthcare systems. CHLPI is a clinical teaching program of Harvard Law School and mentors students to become skilled, innovative, and thoughtful practitioners as well as leaders in health and public health law and policy. For more information, visit <http://www.chlpi.org>.

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