

To: EU Member States Governments

From: Participants of the European HCV Elimination Summit – Vilnius, Lithuania – September 19, 2024

Call to Action to Eliminate Hepatitis C in Europe

Together with the Coalition for Global Hepatitis Elimination (<https://www.globalhep.org/>) and in line with the World Health Organization's goal to eliminate Hepatitis C virus (HCV) by 2030, we call the Governments of the EU Member States to unite all partners to accelerate HCV elimination in Europe.

HCV is a leading cause of liver failure and cancer causing over 290,000 deaths globally each year. Among WHO regions, Europe is the region with the largest number of persons living with HCV – 12.5M of the 58M persons living with HCV globally. In 2019, the European region had the second highest number of new HCV infections (297,100) and second highest number of deaths (64,200). Across the European region, only an estimated one in four persons living with HCV are aware of their infection and only one in ten have been treated to cure their infection¹.

The consequences of leaving hepatitis C untreated are severe. As well as cirrhosis and liver failure, over 20% of liver cancers are caused by HCV². Liver cancer is the third most common cause of cancer deaths: in 2020 alone, liver cancer killed approximately 78,000 people in Europe and over 800,000 people globally. Liver cancer is also one of the most complex and expensive cancers to treat. Between 2020 and 2050, the global cost of caring for patients with liver cancer is projected to be €1.6 trillion⁴.

With the availability of effective prevention measures, reliable tests and curative therapies, WHO has targeted to eliminate HCV by 2030.

As countries of the European region have the largest HCV burden, they may have the most to gain in health and economic benefits from increases in HCV testing and treatment. Reaching targets for HCV elimination will reduce disease prevalence to 3 million persons, prevent 3.4 million new infections and avert 382,000 deaths from liver disease caused by HCV. With savings in health care costs and increases in productivity from a healthier work force, HCV elimination will increase total productivity of European countries to €12.5 billion by 2030 and \$170.5 billion by 2050.

To achieve these gains in health and productivity, the attendees of the European HCV Elimination Summit call upon Europe's Governments for immediate action by all EU Member states and other European countries to provide equitable access to services needed to prevent, cure and eliminate HCV, particularly for populations at high risk for HCV infection:

Mobilize all partners working in hepatitis C area: to reach HCV elimination, the best outcomes are achieved when all partners cooperate closely, including: the Ministries of Health, Social Affairs, Justice, local and EU Parliament members, National Sick Funds, Healthcare Professionals and Patient Societies, National Public Health and Communicable Disease Centers, WHO officers, Epidemiologists, Health economists, pharmaceutical industry and diagnostics representatives, and other stakeholders. Everyone's collaboration is essential to include HCV into Governments' Healthcare Priority List.

Place people affected by HCV at the center of all that you do: meaningfully engage people affected by viral hepatitis as key stakeholders in all areas of work including policy, development, and delivery of programs from raising awareness, testing and support through to broadly accessible treatment.

Commit to the Hepatitis C elimination: enable public health and clinical care data to evaluate HCV burden and allocate adequate funds and resources for advancing access to prevention, testing and treatment services.

With the strategic information, develop and implement a national plan for HCV elimination. The plan can guide engaging key stakeholders, health awareness campaigns to raise HCV elimination benefits among the public, and policy makers, and implement programs focused on prevention, testing, linkage to care, and treatment to cure.

Prioritize national HCV targeted screening programs: every country should allocate sufficient funds for programs to reach targets for HCV testing of key populations. Persons at risk for HCV infection can include people born before 1994 prior to broad adoption of reliable tests for blood transfusion screening and other prevention measures. Persons with ongoing risk for HCV infection include people who inject drugs, people who live with mental health issues, incarcerated individuals, uninsured individuals, and marginalized populations. Furthermore, effective patients' linkage from diagnosis to healthcare institution is crucial to ensure impactful HCV management in the countries.

These key actions will enable the EU member states to identify cases early, provide timely interventions and reduce the burden of HCV-related complications like liver cancer, saving numerous lives, gaining productivity and ultimately achieving HCV elimination.

By signing this Call to Action, we demonstrate our global solidarity in the commitment to HCV elimination, demand the development of national strategies, focused on implementing screening and treatment programs equally accessible to all persons who can benefit from them. Together, we are working towards a future where goals for HCV elimination are achieving health and economic gains for the EU Member States and other European countries.

1 HCV Policy Forum | Side-Event at EASL Congress June 21, 2023

2 Global burden of primary liver cancer in 2020 and predictions to 2040.” Journal of Hepatology.
Available at:

[https://www.journal-of-hepatology.eu/article/S0168-8278\(22\)03022-7/fulltext/](https://www.journal-of-hepatology.eu/article/S0168-8278(22)03022-7/fulltext/)

3 “Liver Cancer: Europe’s Public Health Ticking Time Bomb.” Health Policy Watch.

<https://healthpolicy-watch.news/liver-cancer-europe/>

4 National Institutes of Health, Estimates and Projections of the Global Economic Cost of 29
Cancers in 204 Countries and Territories From 2020 to 2050

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9951101/>

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