**Marking World Hepatitis Day: A call for federal leadership**

There is an infectious disease affecting at least 250,000 Canadians. Since 2014 we have had a cure for this disease that can lead to depression, fatigue, and eventually to cancer, organ failure, and death, yet treatment rates remain low in Canada.

One reason for this is that our screening guidelines for this disease are outdated. They don’t include recommended testing for those born between 1945-1975, even though all evidence shows that this age group represents 75% of those who have this disease. As a result of inadequate screening, almost ½ of those affected don’t even know it.

Even those that know they have this disease often have to fight to get treated, because of eligibility criteria put in place to restrict access to these high-priced medicines.

For any other disease, this would be unacceptable, but the stigma that surrounds hepatitis C has allowed this to occur. World Hepatitis Day, marked on July 28th each year, is a chance to raise awareness of this public health crisis.

This spring, the Government of Canada, along with all 193 other member states of the World Health Organization (WHO), unanimously adopted the first Global Viral Hepatitis Strategy, with targets to eliminate hepatitis C as a public health threat by 2030.

Minister of Health Dr. Jane Philpott restated her commitment to meeting these targets at an event to kick off Canada’s World Hepatitis Day campaign in Ottawa last month. “We are pleased to hear the Minister’s assurances of the government’s commitment,” states Adam Cook, a policy analyst at CTAC and executive member for Action Hepatitis Canada (AHC). “However, in the absence of a coherent national plan for the treatment and care of those living with hepatitis C, we have concerns that these goals cannot be met.”

Patricia Bacon, the chair of Action Hepatitis Canada, agrees. “We want to see a national strategy to support the provinces and territories in developing their own action plans to cure thousands of Canadians and deliver on our international commitments.”

To that end, the coalition of 53 member organizations from across the country has started a [parliamentary petition](https://petitions.parl.gc.ca/en/Petition/Details?Petition=e-458). *[Local organization]* joins the AHC in asking supporters to sign the petition, using this opportunity to send the message to the federal government that leadership is wanted - and needed - to make hepatitis C a public health crisis of the past. *[Add plug for local event, if relevant.]*

**Action Hepatitis Canada**

Action Hepatitis Canada is a national coalition of organizations responding to hepatitis B and C. Our work engages government, policy makers, and civil society across Canada to promote hepatitis B and C prevention, improve access to care and treatment, increase knowledge and innovation, create public health awareness, build health-professional capacity, and support community-based groups and initiatives. Learn more at [www.actionhepatitiscanada.ca](file:///C:\Users\Jennifer\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Outlook\V2Q4GM7E\www.actionhepatitiscanada.ca).

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