**On World Hepatitis Day, Canadians have little to celebrate**

***Advocates looking to Government of Canada for leadership on this critical issue***

July 28th marks World Hepatitis Day but, unfortunately, the celebrations have yet to begin in Canada. This time last year, hepatitis C advocates were optimistic as Canada’s new Health Minister Dr. Jane Philpott signed onto the World Health Organization (WHO)’s first ever Global Viral Hepatitis Strategy, with the goal of eliminating viral hepatitis as a public health threat in Canada by 2030.

“One year ago, it truly looked like our government was finally going to address viral hepatitis as a public health threat,” comments Patricia Bacon, Chair of Action Hepatitis Canada. “But today, it’s disappointing to see that not much has happened.”

The WHO strategy to which Canada signed on includes specific hepatitis reduction targets, and all countries were asked to develop a National Action Plan to meet these targets. Today, Canada still has no National Action Plan in place, leaving many advocates questioning the government’s commitment. Experts agree that a good strategy should include national targets with well-defined indicators, and population-specific strategies that will help close some of the gaps in hepatitis C care, which remains a huge burden on Canada and our health care system.

“Currently we have a treatment that can cure hepatitis C, but more than half of Canadians who have hepatitis C do not realize they are infected. A National Action Plan could be targeting those populations we know are at higher risk,” continues Bacon.

One of the groups at highest risk is those born between 1945-1975; evidence shows that 75% of Canadians with hepatitis C fall within this age cohort. But with no National Action Plan, there is no evidence-based testing plan and many of these individuals remain undiagnosed.

“I was diagnosed by a fluke, after feeling sick for years and searching for answers,” remarks Daryl Luster, Vice-Chair of Action Hepatitis Canada and a hepatitis C survivor. “We have all this evidence showing people my age are at high risk, and we have been asking for years for the government to recommend a one-time test for people within my age group, but so far, nothing has happened. We are being left behind.”

Advocates are left wondering why Canada would make an international health commitment to work to eliminate hepatitis C by 2030, and then not follow through with a plan. Still today Canada has no plan to effectively identify and diagnose all Canadians with hepatitis C, no coherent plan for ensuring all Canadians receive timely treatment, and no plan for ensuring people aren’t lost to care.

Action Hepatitis Canada, along with its many allies, are calling on the federal Health Minister and Canadian Parliamentarians to follow through on the commitment made one year ago, and put in place a National Action Plan that will provide guidance and set targets for hepatitis C prevention, diagnosis and treatment across the provinces and territories. This plan must be matched with appropriate funding and resources. Without it, Canadians will remain sick needlessly, and that’s nothing to celebrate.

**Action Hepatitis Canada**

Action Hepatitis Canada is a national coalition of 59 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).

For more information and to set up interviews with survivors, contact

Jennifer van Gennip [jvangennip@actionhep.ca](mailto:jvangennip@actionhep.ca)