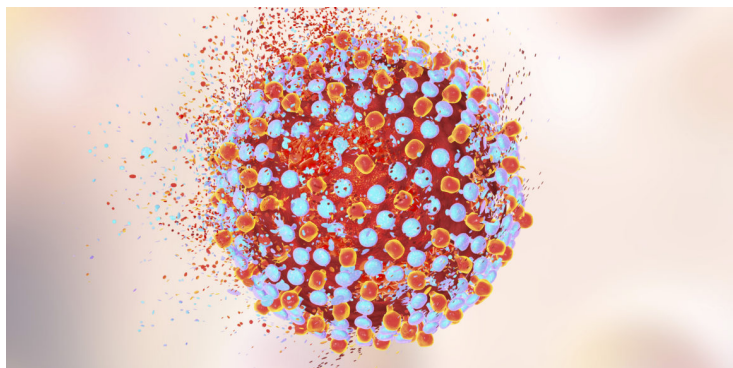


Gilead launches HepConnect initiative to combat Hepatitis C infections

29 March 2019 | News

Funding will Expand Testing, Harm Reduction Services and Healthcare Infrastructure in States with Highest Infection Rates



Gilead Sciences, Inc. has announced HepConnect, a five-year, multi-million dollar initiative aimed at addressing the sharp increase in chronic hepatitis C (HCV) infections fueled by the nation's opioid crisis. In partnership with the Harm Reduction Coalition (HRC) and local organizations, the initiative will support evidence-based solutions to meet the needs of people most affected by the opioid crisis in Indiana, Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee and West Virginia.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the increase in injection drug use has led to a more than tripling of new HCV infections in greater Appalachia. The CDC reports that in central Appalachia, HCV infections rose 364 percent between 2006 and 2012. Currently, 2.4 million people are living with HCV in the United States and an estimated 50 percent of those infected aren't aware they have the virus.

HepConnect builds on Gilead's long-term commitment and history of addressing HCV in impacted populations globally. HepConnect will prioritize three programmatic areas:

1. Expand Screening and Linkage to Care: Fighting rising HCV infection rates by testing for the virus and ensuring those impacted can access appropriate care.
2. Support Harm Reduction and Community Education: Opening doors to harm reduction services to all who need them to help reduce HCV transmission.
3. Activate Healthcare Infrastructure: Building resources, know-how and capacity in communities where the need is greatest.

"As we battle the scourge that is the opioid crisis, we must address the rise of Hepatitis C as a consequence. Hepatitis C is curable, yet impacts over 40,000 people in the Commonwealth," said Kentucky Governor Matt Bevin. "It is imperative we continue educating people on this disease. Prevention and seamless coordination are key to eradicating this in the commonwealth. We genuinely appreciate Gilead taking this effort as seriously as we do."

In December 2018, Gilead launched a call for proposals from national and regional organizations with harm reduction expertise. The Harm Reduction Coalition was selected as the lead grantee because of its capacity to guide strategic planning across the program, provide technical assistance and manage grant opportunities that support harm reduction and community education work in the initiative's target states.