

HIV+HEP

POLICY INSTITUTE

PRESS STATEMENT

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Sens. Cassidy & Van Hollen Introduce Historic Bill to Eliminate Hepatitis C

Establishes Nationwide Program to Increase Access to Curative Drugs

Washington DC... In reaction to the introduction today by Senators Bill Cassidy (R-LA) and Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) of a [bipartisan bill](#) to establish a \$9.8 billion nationwide “Hepatitis C Elimination Program,” **Carl Schmid, executive director** of the [HIV+Hepatitis Policy Institute](#), issued the following statement:

“We deeply thank Chairman Cassidy and Senator Van Hollen for their bipartisan leadership and dedication to eliminating hepatitis C. It has been unacceptable that people with hepatitis C have had to overcome so many discriminatory barriers instituted by state Medicaid programs and insurers to access hepatitis C curative drugs over the past twelve years since the first drug was approved. Additionally, our government has failed to invest in the public health infrastructure needed to increase awareness, testing, and linkage to care and the curative drugs. This bill, if enacted, will finally provide the necessary resources to ensure that more people are diagnosed and linked to no-cost treatment so that we can eventually eliminate hepatitis C.

“We look forward to Congressional consideration of the bill and the opportunity to provide comment as it moves through the legislative process. The program envisioned by the senators ensures there is access to the drugs in communities and populations, such as correctional and Indian health systems, that have not previously enjoyed widespread access. On the other hand, hepatitis C drugs should be currently covered by all state Medicaid programs, and each state can negotiate rebates with individual manufacturers to bring down the cost of the drugs. Therefore, we look forward to Congress’ views on the proposed nationwide subscription model and the impacts of the possibility of awarding it to only one manufacturer.

“A program of this magnitude will take some time for Congress to consider. In the meantime, we call on Congress to immediately ensure there is funding to sustain and hopefully increase the CDC and states’ ability today to address all forms of hepatitis. Currently, Congress allocates only \$43 million to the CDC for hepatitis prevention for the entire country. President Trump proposed in his [budget](#) to block grant hepatitis prevention with STD and tuberculosis prevention, and in doing so, cut the overall funding by \$77 million. In order to ensure there is dedicated funding for hepatitis, this budget proposal should be rejected.”

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The **HIV+Hepatitis Policy Institute** is a national, non-profit organization whose mission is to promote quality and affordable healthcare for people living with or at risk of HIV, hepatitis, and other serious and chronic health conditions.