

*****EMBARGOED UNTIL WEDNESDAY 17 FEBRUARY 2016, 12.00 PM CET*****

Hepatitis C-free Europe is possible by 2030

BRUSSELS, 17 February 2016 – Europe’s leading experts, medical specialists and patient advocacy groups on hepatitis announced their intention to work towards the elimination of Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) in Europe by 2030.

The ‘Hepatitis C Elimination Manifesto’ was presented at the first EU HCV Policy Summit, organised by the Hepatitis B and C Public Policy Association, and supported by the main European patient and clinician groups.

Signatories of the ‘Hepatitis C Elimination Manifesto’ pledge to:

- Make hepatitis C and its elimination in Europe an explicit public health priority to be pursued at all levels
- Ensure that patients, civil society groups and other relevant stakeholders are directly involved in developing and implementing hepatitis C elimination strategies
- Pay particular attention to the links between hepatitis C and social marginalisation
- Introduce a European Hepatitis Awareness Week

Vytenis Andriukaitis, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, delivered a keynote speech at the event, commenting: “Hepatitis C has in the past been referred to as a “silent” epidemic within the European Union. It is high time that we brought this “silent” epidemic out of the shadows and into the light, so I welcome initiatives such as this Summit and the Elimination Manifesto to create momentum for action, for raising awareness and for stimulating discussion”.

After twenty five years of research, scientists have delivered the means to effectively cure hepatitis C, paving the way for elimination in Europe within the next decade. “What would have taken a hundred years for us to achieve, is now at hand! This is a unique opportunity, but political action is needed to make this happen”, stated Prof Angelos Hatzakis, Co-Chair of the Hepatitis B and C Public Policy Association. “Our ‘Elimination Manifesto’ is a rallying platform for policymakers and advocates. If we act now, Europe will be hepatitis C free by 2030”, continued Prof Hatzakis.

The specific challenges of hepatitis C require holistic, people-centred, health system-wide approaches to disease awareness, prevention and integrated care, with all stakeholders combining their diverse skills and resources in a unified response.

“Succeeding against hepatitis C in Europe is even more important given the current international crises and refugee flows towards our countries”, explained Cristian-Silviu Buşoi, Member of the European Parliament and Co-chair of the Parliament’s Friends of the Liver group. Buşoi continued: “Elimination strategies need to take into consideration the links between hepatitis C and marginalised groups, such as recent migrants, people who inject drugs and others.”

“The Manifesto sets out our vision and commitment to eliminate hepatitis C in Europe”, declared Prof Michael P. Manns, Co-Chair of the Hepatitis B and C Public Policy Association, “concrete actions at all levels must follow to achieve our goal”. The Manifesto will be presented to national and local governments as well as to the European institutions to encourage action.

Signatories

The Elimination Manifesto is supported by the following organisations:

- European Liver Patients Association (ELPA)
- European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL)
- Viral Hepatitis Prevention Board (VHPB)
- The Correlation Network
- The International Center for Migration Health and Development (ICMHD)
- The World Hepatitis Alliance (WHA)
- Hepatitis B and C Public Policy Association

About Hepatitis C in Europe

- Hepatitis C (HCV) is a **major public health problem** in Europe. In the EU more people die each year from HCV than from HIV.
- HCV is 7 times **more prevalent than HIV** in Europe.
- An estimated 15 million Europeans are chronically infected, including **5.5 million living in EU**; each year there are **27,000-29,000 newly diagnosed** HCV cases in the EU/EEA.
- Existing evidence shows that, for some European countries, **annual deaths from HCV have quadrupled over the past 20 years**.
- Even with Europe's generally good tracking of epidemics, HCV continues to spread undetected as a "**silent pandemic**" as patients often have no symptoms during the first 20-30 years.
- HCV is the **leading cause of liver transplantation** in adults; **healthcare costs** increase exponentially with the progression of liver disease, which goes in parallel with patients' suffering.
- In addition, **indirect costs** related to **loss of productivity** make the economic burden of the disease even more significant.

About Elimination

- Elimination of a disease is intended as the reduction to zero of the incidence of a specified disease in a defined geographical area as a result of deliberate efforts.
- HCV elimination was made possible by recent therapeutic advances, which have made HCV curable in the majority of instances - cure rates have progressed from 6% in 1991 (first interferon approved treatment for HCV) to over 90% in 2014 (directly acting antivirals introduced).
- Holistic approaches and strategies to improve overall awareness, increase testing for those at risk and link infected individuals to specific care pathways need to be developed.

About the "Hepatitis C Elimination Manifesto"

The main authors of the "Hepatitis C Elimination Manifesto" are:

- Prof Jeffrey V. Lazarus, University of Copenhagen (Denmark)
- Prof Mark Thursz, Imperial College, London (UK)
- Prof Pierre Van Damme, Viral Hepatitis Prevention Board, Vaccine and Infectious Disease Institute, Antwerp (Belgium)
- Prof Angelos Hatzakis, Athens University Medical School (Greece)

About the first EU HCV Summit

The EU HCV Summit was organised by the Hepatitis B & C Public Policy Association in partnership with European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL), the European Liver Patient Association (ELPA) and the Correlation Network. It was financially supported by AbbVie, BMS, Gilead and MSD. The Summit, which was attended by 120 policymakers and stakeholders from across Europe and beyond, was officially endorsed by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), the International Centre for Migration, Health and Development (ICMHD), the European Parliament Friends of the Liver Group and the World Hepatitis Alliance (WHA).

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About Hepatitis B & C Public Policy Association

The Hepatitis B & C Public Policy Association was founded in 2009 by a group of leading European scientists, public health experts and patient advocates. We aim to urge and facilitate the formulation of public policies at national and international level for the communication, prevention and management of viral Hepatitis B and C. The Association's unique approach in furtherance of this aim is to gather together, and work in partnership with, the major stakeholders in the field of these diseases including regulators, patients, clinicians, public health and civil society communities and the private sector. The Association's main activities to date include three major hepatitis summits with ensuing calls to action. The Association has working groups and publishes a Newsletter 4 times per year for 4000 stakeholders in the field of hepatitis. For more information about the Association's activities please visit www.hepbcppa.org

