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World Hepatitis Alliance Launches First Major Policy Report on Viral Hepatitis

Research commissioned by World Health Organization finds 80% of governments regard hepatitis B and C as an urgent public health issue

Vienna, Austria. Saturday 17 April - The World Hepatitis Alliance and World Health Organization (WHO) today launch a major report 'Viral Hepatitis: Global Policy', at the European Association for the Study of the Liver's (EASL) International Liver Congress. This unprecedented report captures the extent of viral hepatitis policies around the world and shows that while effective policy exists in some countries, there is substantial variation and in many countries it is not in place or requires significant strengthening.

The World Hepatitis Alliance was commissioned by the WHO to conduct this research throughout all 193 member states, examining existing policies as well as areas in which the WHO might assist. The report published today collates information from 135 countries and highlights a global need to tackle viral hepatitis with a more unified approach.

Key findings show that:

- 80% of responding countries regard hepatitis B and / or C as an urgent public health issue, although only 70% of countries have a national strategy in place for the prevention and control of viral hepatitis;
- While 82% of countries report having hepatitis B and / or C surveillance measures in place, one-third of countries report that they have no prevalence data available and more than two-thirds request assistance to improve their surveillance measures;
- Just 41% of all governments report having funded any public awareness campaign around hepatitis B and / or hepatitis C in the past five years;
- Only two in five people live in countries where testing is accessible to more than half of the population and only 4% of low income countries report that testing is accessible. Furthermore, over half of the global population lives in countries with no provision for free testing;

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- 41% of the global population lives in countries where no government funding exists for the treatment of hepatitis B or C, with four out of five low income countries and almost one in three high income countries welcoming assistance to increase access to treatment

Commenting on the launch of this report Charles Gore, President of the World Hepatitis Alliance, said “In a world in which there is so much migration it is hard to see how two highly prevalent, infectious diseases can be prevented and controlled without a more unified approach. This report provides compelling evidence that while some governments are winning the battle to combat viral hepatitis within their national borders many countries have simply not begun to tackle viral hepatitis B and C, something that will in the long-term undermine the efforts of other countries.”

The report also shows the majority of governments do not choose to tackle hepatitis alone, with almost three quarters collaborating with non-state organisations, most prominently the WHO. Over 90% of all governments report at least one area in which WHO support would further strengthen efforts to prevent and control viral hepatitis.

“The WHO commissioned this research to provide a clearer understanding of the global viral hepatitis policy landscape” explained Dr Keiji Fukuda, WHO Special Adviser to the Director-General on Pandemic Influenza. “The responses reveal significant variations between countries, from those that have not yet begun to tackle viral hepatitis to those with comprehensive policies to prevent and control these diseases. What emerges is the need for a more consistent, co-ordinated approach and the desire of Member States for support from the WHO in delivering this. This study provides an important background to the discussions on viral hepatitis and the adoption of a resolution at the upcoming 63rd World Health Assembly.”

This report has been published exactly one month prior to the start of the 63rd World Health Assembly at which the first comprehensive resolution on viral hepatitis will be discussed. The resolution calls for a broad range of action across surveillance, awareness, prevention, diagnosis, care and access to treatment. If adopted, it would represent a major step forward

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in addressing the needs of the one-twelfth of the global population currently infected and preventing the ongoing transmission to millions more every year.

Did You Know?

- Approximately 500 million people worldwide are infected with hepatitis B or C¹
- This is over 10 times the number infected with HIV/AIDS²
- Between them, hepatitis B and C kill one million people a year¹
- One in every three people on the planet has been exposed to either or both viruses
- Most of the 500 million infected do not know

World Hepatitis Alliance

The World Hepatitis Alliance provides global leadership and supports action that will halt the death toll and improve the lives of people living with chronic viral hepatitis B and C. Through better awareness, prevention, care, support and access to treatment, our ultimate goal is to work with governments to eradicate these diseases from the planet.

The World Hepatitis Alliance is a Non-Governmental Organisation representing more than 280 hepatitis B and C patient groups from around the world. The World Hepatitis Alliance is governed by a representative board elected by patient groups from seven world regions: Europe, Eastern Mediterranean, Africa, North America, Latin America, Australasia and Western Pacific. For further information visit: www.worldhepatitisalliance.org

World Hepatitis Alliance – Seeking a world without viral hepatitis B and C.

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References

¹ World Health Organization. Viral hepatitis: Report by the Secretariat http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/EB126/B126_15-en.pdf (accessed 06 April, 2010)

² World Health Organization. Global summary of the AIDS epidemic. http://data.unaids.org/pub/Report/2009/JC1700_Epi_Update_2009_en.pdf (accessed 06 April, 2010)