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Your online magazine from the World Hepatitis Alliance

World Hepatitis Alliance

HEP VOICE

The Magazine

Impact | Stories | Activism

WELCOME TO HEP VOICE!

Our first issue of Hep Voice in 2026 highlights changes being accelerated in hepatitis elimination – across generations, attitudes, and the next phase necessary to reach our 2030 goal.

Through programme initiatives NOhep Mums, our project with SAAFARA in Senegal, and our role in SAFEStart+, WHA and our members are working to expand access to hepatitis B vaccination for pregnant women, helping prevent mother-to-child transmission and ensuring that babies begin life protected from this entirely preventable infection. By strengthening maternal vaccination and early protection, the global community can take a decisive step toward ending hepatitis B for future generations.

Alongside prevention, the alliance has continued to raise the global profile of the link between hepatitis and liver cancer. Too often overlooked, viral hepatitis remains the leading cause of liver cancer worldwide, yet increased awareness of this connection is helping to strengthen advocacy, drive earlier testing and treatment, and place hepatitis firmly on the global health agenda.

Taking place 28–30 April in Bangkok, Thailand, the World Hepatitis Summit is the leading international conference focused on the public health response to viral hepatitis and making its elimination a reality. WHS2026 will bring together people with lived experience, policymakers, healthcare professionals, civil society, researchers, and global health leaders to share experiences, explore solutions, and strengthen collaboration under an urgent theme: “Elimination for everyone, everywhere… right now!”

We look forward to connecting with colleagues, partners, and advocates from around the world at this pivotal gathering – and hope to see many of you there. Register your place at **worldhepatitissummit.org/register**

Cary James, WHA Chief Executive

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Want to share a feature for Hep Voice?

Share your news or story by emailing contact@worldhepatitisalliance.org

HEP HEADLINES

Voices from the frontline: how global funding cuts are reshaping the viral hepatitis response

Hepatitis B and hepatitis C are among the world's leading public health threats, yet remain neglected by global funding – and US cuts to foreign aid are destabilising efforts to achieve their elimination.

To understand how this is playing out in the real world, WHA, the Coalition for Global Hepatitis Elimination, and the Hepatitis Elimination Lab (Plan-B) collected surveys from 240 individuals and groups working internationally in hepatitis awareness, patient support, vaccination, testing, care, treatment, and research, including WHA members.

Informed by their responses, we have co-authored a comment piece for The Lancet Gastroenterology & Hepatology exploring how changes in the global funding landscape have impacted people's lives and work so far. Read the article here.

Finger-prick testing ‘can detect hepatitis B in one hour’

While finger-prick blood tests have proven an effective alternative to lab testing for many diseases including hepatitis C, its efficacy for hepatitis B DNA has so far remained unknown. The Kirby Institute has now published findings from a study of finger-prick blood testing that suggests hepatitis B DNA can be detected within one hour, and with accuracy comparable to standard lab methods. As a point-of-care approach, this could dramatically expand access to diagnosis, particularly in remote or resource-limited settings. Read more about the study results here.

WHO challenges ethics of proposed hepatitis vaccine trial

The World Health Organization (WHO) has raised serious ethical and scientific concerns about a potential US-funded hepatitis B birth-dose vaccine trial in Guinea-Bissau that would withhold a proven, life-saving vaccine from some newborns. In a statement, WHO emphasised the vaccine’s established safety and effectiveness, and how withholding it could cause harm, and urged adherence to ethical standards and universal newborn protection. Read more here and here.

Evidence of rat hepatitis E virus circulation in wastewater in Central Argentina

A US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study has found evidence of rat hepatitis E virus circulating in wastewater in central Argentina. By highlighting rodents as reservoirs and potential sources of human infection, the findings demonstrate the value of wastewater surveillance for detecting emerging zoonotic threats and improving early warning systems for viral hepatitis and other infectious diseases. Read the article here.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

APRIL

World Hepatitis Summit 2026
28–30 April
Bangkok, Thailand

The world's largest global multi-stakeholder summit focused on accelerating progress toward viral hepatitis elimination through policy, partnerships, and best-practice sharing. Discover more on p.8!
worldhepatitissummit.org

APASL 2026
22–25 April
Istanbul

This major event's main objectives are to promote the latest scientific advancement and education of hepatology science, exchange information and develop consensus, encourage the practice of medicine in liver diseases, and coordinate scientific studies throughout the Asia Pacific region.
apasl2026istanbul.org

MAY

World Health Assembly (WHA) 2026
18–23 May
Geneva

Held annually in Geneva, Switzerland, the World Health Assembly is attended by delegations from all WHO Member States to consider WHO's health agenda. One of the most important moments of the year for advocacy by groups with official relations with WHO, and developments in the current direction of global health.
who.int/about/governance/world-health-assembly

EASL Congress 2026
27–30 May
Barcelona

Europe's largest event dedicated to liver health, bringing together doctors, scientists, allied health professionals, patients, and industry partners to share knowledge, highlight breakthroughs, and build meaningful connections. Its four days cover scientific programme spanning the full spectrum of hepatology, a variety of session formats, and this year will also be available to attend online.
easlcongress.eu

JULY

World Hepatitis Day 2026
28 July
Global observance

Each year on World Hepatitis Day, one of WHO's officially mandated global public health days, we demand action from decision makers to prioritise the elimination of this deadly disease – with WHA providing a coordinated campaign for everyone to take part in. Keep an eye out for updates on this year's campaign theme and identity on the World Hepatitis Day website!
worldhepatitisday.org

SEPTEMBER

UN General Assembly (UNGA) 2026 (81st session)
8–22 September
New York City

The main annual gathering of United Nations Member States to discuss global political, economic, and health priorities – and therefore another vital moment in the calendar for advocacy work worldwide.
unhabitat.org/events/81st-session-of-the-un-general-assembly-unga-81

COLDA 2026
17–19 September
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

COLDA 2026 aims to empower healthcare professionals to diagnose, prevent, treat, and achieve a cure for liver diseases in Africa. Expect scientific and educational abstract-driven keynote speeches, lectures, oral and poster abstract presentations, roundtable discussions, and debates.
solda-society.org/colda

World Cancer Congress 2026
24–26 September
Hong Kong

This bi-annual global oncology congress organised by the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC) convenes stakeholders to address cancer control, research, and policy worldwide. Essential for anyone raising awareness and advocating for action around the relationship between liver cancer and hepatitis.
worldcancercongress.org

World Hepatitis Summit 2026 demands “Elimination for everyone, everywhere… right now!”

We are at a pivotal moment in the fight to end hepatitis as a public health threat. With only four years remaining to achieve the 2030 targets, the theme of the World Hepatitis Summit 2026 is an urgent call for equity and action – “Elimination for everyone, everywhere… right now!”

Previous summits have provided an important platform for people affected by hepatitis to share vital ideas, experiences, and best practices with key decision-makers. As the only conference of its scale focused on a public health approach, the summit has built a strong reputation for turning ideas into actions and global commitments that truly represent the hepatitis community’s priorities and future.

We achieve this by bringing together a unique and diverse group of participants. Communities with lived experience are at the heart of the summit and share an equal platform with ministers of health, policymakers and senior government officials, medical professionals, international development partners, civil society organisations, funders, donors, and representatives from the private sector.

The summit also gives equal attention to hepatitis challenges that often receive limited attention in other forums. In 2026, critical issues such as triple elimination, hepatitis delta, a functional cure for hepatitis B, equitable access to diagnostics, harm reduction, vaccines, cancer prevention, and domestic financing will all be explored with the urgency and depth they demand. These discussions will then be followed by regional workshops led by WHO to determine next steps.

With 70% of the world’s viral hepatitis-related deaths occurring in Asia, WHA feels it is vital to bring the summit to the continent for the first time. We are honoured to be hosted by the Ministry of Public Health in Thailand – a country that has demonstrated strong leadership in the effort to eliminate viral hepatitis – and for the summit to be co-sponsored by WHO.

This April, we come together to identify immediate and lasting solutions for everyone, everywhere. Join us from **28–30 April in Bangkok, Thailand**, for the World Hepatitis Summit 2026 and make your voice heard!

Explore the full summit programme at **worldhepatitissummit.org/programme/**

Register your place at **worldhepatitissummit.org/register/**

The overarching objectives of WHS 2026 are:

- To foster collaboration across a wide group of stakeholders
- To promote the public health approach to hepatitis elimination
- To accelerate the sharing of best practice
- To empower governments to accelerate their efforts to reach the 2030 targets
- To provide a platform for the communities disproportionally affected by viral hepatitis
- To highlight the importance of a people-centred approach
- To recognise the achievements made to date, identify gaps in global, regional and national responses, and explore opportunities for closing those gaps

What our speakers are saying:

“The summit gives us another opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills to take urgent action to help eliminate viral hepatitis in our lifetimes.”

Gloria Yamen Sonnen-Atinge,
Rosa Development Initiative, Nigeria

“I look forward to learning how others globally are working through many of the same hepatitis C challenges and sharing ideas on what is working in their communities.”

Ronni Marks, The Hepatitis C Mentor
& Support Group, USA

"For young people living with HIV, addressing hepatitis is part of the journey of living positively with co-infections. I’m excited to be at the summit to bring youth perspectives into shaping more integrated and inclusive health responses."

Eddy Rudram, Y+ Global, Thailand

“The summit is a powerful opportunity to accelerate hepatitis elimination through meaningful partnerships, particularly with cancer organisations. By working across sectors, we can extend our collective impact and move faster toward prevention, equity and elimination.”

Todd Harper, Cancer Council Victoria, Australia

About the venue

WHS 2026 will take place at **Eastin Grand Hotel Phayathai Conference Facilities** at the Unicorn Bangkok.

Located in the heart of Bangkok, the venue is directly connected to Phaya Thai Station and its Airport Rail Link and BTS Skytrain lines, making access simple and convenient.

For suggestions on accommodation for your stay, visit **worldhepatitissummit.org/venue-and-destination/**

COMMUNITY LEADING INNOVATION AT C-FREE

In the Bangkok sub-district of Samsen Nok, an unassuming drop-in clinic is the setting for something transformative. Inside, people who use drugs can sit in a waiting room, talk openly with staff, and receive hepatitis C screening and treatment alongside other health services. For many visitors, it is one of the few places where they feel safe seeking care.

What appears simple is the result of years of work to make healthcare more accessible to people often excluded from traditional systems. New Step Clinic Lad Prao operates under the C-FREE model, developed by the Thai NGO Dreamlopments – an ongoing study across eleven sites in Thailand, testing community-based approaches to screening and treating hepatitis C, and other infections including hepatitis B and HIV. The name itself reflects the programme's principles: Community-based, Flexible, Responsive, Equitable and Effective.

Rather than expecting patients to navigate hospitals that may feel intimidating or judgmental, C-FREE brings services directly into spaces run by trusted community groups. Drop-in centres work in partnership with local hospitals, while outreach teams meet people in the neighbourhoods where they live. The goal is to remove barriers to care and create environments where people feel respected.

"C-FREE is an exciting project, a consistent motivation, as we know it impacts the lives of many people and influences government programmes," says Dr Nicolas Durier, founder and director of Dreamlopments. "It is also very demanding, as it is a large-scale project implemented in multiple areas in Thailand, serving many people with challenging needs. Over the past six years, we have continued to adapt its design to address evolving needs and objectives."

At its core, the programme focuses on communities at high risk of hepatitis C and other infections, including people who use or inject drugs, men who have sex with men, transgender people, and their partners. According to Durier, many participants face stigma or discrimination

in hospital settings, which can prevent them from seeking treatment.

“Above all, they are people who need trusted, peer-driven healthcare services,” he explains. “Many experience real or perceived barriers to hospital-based care and stigma discrimination.”

For participants, those trusted spaces can make a life-changing difference. Mr Tee, a 47-year-old former participant, first encountered C-FREE while struggling with drug use and hepatitis C.

“I used to inject heroin and had hepatitis C,” he recalls. “I had the opportunity to get screened and treated through the C-FREE study. At first, I didn’t really take care of myself. I wasn’t disciplined about medication, and I couldn’t quit drugs.”

After serving more than a year in prison, he decided to return to the programme. “When I got out, I was determined to take care of myself,” he says. “The doctors and nurses took excellent care of me, following up and providing me with information. What impressed me most was that they provided medication immediately.” Today, Mr Tee is cured and free of hepatitis C.

Healthcare workers say the programme’s supportive atmosphere is key to these outcomes. Rapeeporn Tuanasiri, a nurse working at C-FREE centres in Samrong, describes the approach as deliberately non-judgmental.

“We made C-FREE a space where at-risk patients feel comfortable,” she says. “They can say openly, ‘I use drugs,’ and learn how to protect or treat themselves.”

That trust has produced strong results. By 2022, just three years into the programme, C-FREE’s data had convinced the Thai government to remove drug use as exclusion criteria from the national hepatitis C treatment programme. Today, more than 90 percent of patients treated for hepatitis C through the study have successfully completed treatment and been cured, according to programme staff.

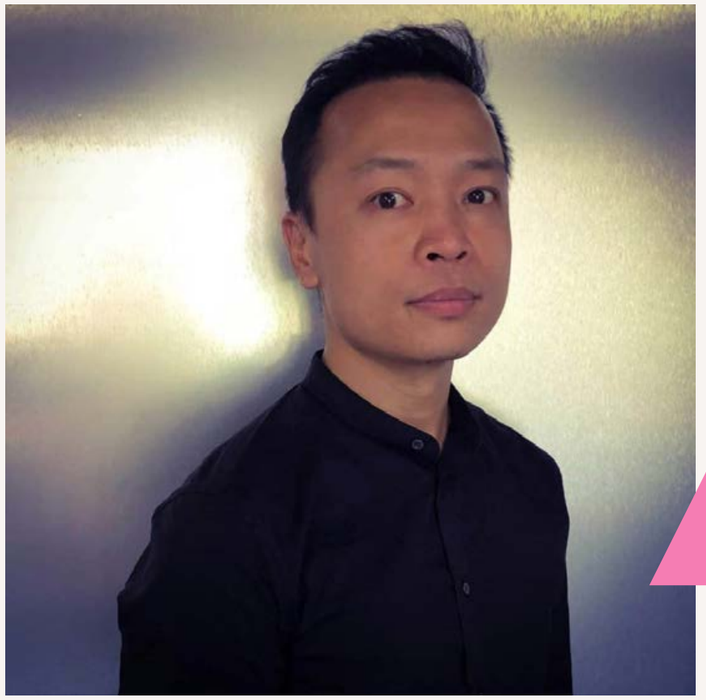
C-FREE is showing how healthcare can work differently when services are shaped around the needs of the people they are meant to reach. By combining community leadership, clinical expertise and government collaboration, the study is helping thousands of people access diagnosis and treatment in environments where they feel respected and supported, and increasingly informing Thailand’s wider response to viral hepatitis.

We made C-FREE a space where at-risk patients feel comfortable,” she says. “They can say openly, ‘I use drugs,’ and learn how to protect or treat themselves.”

FEATURE STORY

MEET WHA'S NEW PRESIDENT

Dee Lee is a highly active, unignorable presence in the global health sector, and we are proud to announce him as WHA's new president.



Following 15 years as the Founder and Director of the Inno Community Development Organisation, Dee became the Director of Inno Asia in 2023. He is also the Chair of the Steering Group for the International Liver Cancer Movement, a Fellow of the Asia Society, and a member of both CEVHAP and ICE-HBV.

Based in China, Dee has long represented the rights of hepatitis patients who cannot access treatment, and employees wrongfully terminated based on blood tests. Thanks to his efforts, in 2014, 200 factories in China ended their hepatitis B screening policy, directly covering more than one million workers.

Dee brings his own lived experience of hepatitis B, and understands the mission and vision of WHA. A WPRO Regional Board Member from 2015-2019, he resumed the role again in 2024, determined to speed-up the process of a functional cure for hepatitis B and to reduce stigma and discrimination as barriers to the elimination of viral hepatitis worldwide.

What first motivated you to become a hepatitis advocate?

At two years old, my blood was contaminated by the very system meant to protect me. I didn't just choose to advocate, I chose to fight the discrimination, the shame, and the global apathy that treats 300 million people like they are invisible.

I refuse to let anyone else live and die in the shadows because of a virus they didn't ask for. I am here as WHA President not to ask for a seat at the table, but to flip the table over. I didn't get into this work to look at spreadsheets or attend polite galas. Today, the 'silent killer' finally gets a voice – and we are going to be very, very loud.

How important is it for people living with hepatitis to speak out?

Silence is where hepatitis thrives. It makes us who are living with it a ghost population, marginalised and ignored. If we stay quiet, we die, it's that simple.

Speaking out is our act of rebellion. It is the only way to transform from victims into a political force that cannot be ignored. Every time one of us speaks, we save a life. We're not just patients, we are the evidence that we can – and will – reclaim our dignity and our lives.

What motivated you to apply to become president?

Viral hepatitis takes a life every 30 seconds. While the world discusses 'global health' in air-conditioned rooms, my community is dying in the hospital. I didn't apply to be a figurehead, I applied to be a catalyst. I am done watching the hepatitis community be treated as collateral damage. I took this seat to turn our collective pain into a global movement that is too loud to be suppressed.

What do you hope to achieve as president?

I want to make it impossible for any government to look at the 300 million people living with hepatitis and say, "Not today." The world has the vaccines, the cures, and the tools to eliminate hepatitis. The only thing it is missing is the political spine to act. The era of asking nicely is over, and the era of demanding action has begun.

How do you believe we can eliminate hepatitis by 2030?

If we keep going at this sluggish, half-hearted pace? We won't. Many governments are retreating. Policies are gathering dust. Some countries axed the hepatitis B vaccine recommendation, some started programmes to criminalise each one of us in the ID system.

But here is where my enthusiasm lies: the power has shifted. We will achieve 2030, not because of a government memo, but because the community is waking up. We will eliminate hepatitis by 2030 by becoming a nuisance to the status quo. We will fight back against the 'norms' until our right is treated as a human right, not a luxury. 2030 isn't a deadline, it's our battleground.

WHA NEWS

SAFEStart+

SAFEStart+ supports countries and communities to design and scale integrated, people-centered services that deliver public health impacts, generate economic benefits, and improve equity, particularly for mothers and babies, vulnerable and marginalised populations, and underfunded health systems. It is co-led by PATH, WHA, and ICWEA, with funding from Unitaid.

The new SAFEStart+ **Global Community Advisory Board (G-CAB)** officially kicked off on 29 January, marking an important milestone for the project. The board brings together a diverse group of 11 representatives, including members with lived experience, from nine countries: **Argentina, Cameroon, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Perú, Paraguay, Uganda and Zambia**. This strong geographic and experiential diversity will be central to shaping inclusive, grounded and community-led responses moving forward.

worldhepatitisalliance.org/safestart

NOhep Mums

As part of World Hepatitis Testing Week 2025, WHA launched the **NOhep Mums In-Country Programme: Accelerating Access to Antenatal Testing for Hepatitis B**. This programme focused on the virus' most common transmission from mother to child, and enrolled five WHA members in five countries to identify and support actions that would have the greatest impact driving change around hepatitis B in their local settings.

Thank you to **National Liver Foundation of Bangladesh, YOUTHAID Liberia**, Nigeria's **Hope Life Support and Empowerment Initiative**, Sierra Leone's **Supporting Entrepreneurship and Economic Development**, and **Vision Outreach Zambia** for all their work! Learn more about the programme and these five WHA members here:

worldhepatitisalliance.org/nohepmums

Supported by Abbott

Community Impact Programme

The **Community Impact Programme (CIP)** is WHA's free e-learning platform full of training and video lectures relevant to hepatitis, advocacy and public health. As well as hepatitis B, C and delta, dedicated modules include:

- Liver cancer and hepatitis
- Mental health and hepatitis
- Developing an advocacy strategy
- Requesting support from funders
- Writing an abstract
- Storytelling

We are currently developing **three brand new modules** covering **management essentials for civil society organisations** working in the hepatitis space, due this summer. Sign up to receive announcements when they are launched!

worldhepatitisalliance.org/community-impact-programme/

SAFAARA

Hepatitis B is a major concern in Senegal, West Africa, where almost 1 in 5 people live with the virus. Due to unequal distribution of services, remote and deprived communities are most likely to be affected, but are also the least likely to have access to healthcare.

Preventing Future Infections: Empowering Communities to Break the Transmission of Hepatitis B from Mother-to-Child is a recently completed project by WHA member SAAFARA Hépatites Sénégal, developed to tackle this problem for pregnant women in the town of Guédiawaye, Dakar. And its results are in!

Outcomes

For mothers

Healthcare providers have reported an increase in confidence and hepatitis B testing among pregnant women.

For health systems

SAAFARA training sessions have improved the capacity of 50 frontline healthcare providers to apply screening, birth dose vaccination and treatment protocols.

At the community level

Outreach sessions about hepatitis B, including 52 talks, radio broadcasts, and training for journalists, reached more than 1,900 people.

Politically

SAAFARA's advocacy secured support from local authorities, national stakeholders, and key opinion leaders. Together, this has relocated hepatitis B more firmly within maternal and child health outcomes and helped normalise conversations of the virus, reducing local stigma and encouraging active promotion of testing.

Watch SAAFARA's inspiring short film here, and read the full report about their activities here.

Keep an eye out for WHA's community toolkit this spring, based upon lessons learnt from the project!

worldhepatitisalliance.org/future-infections/

The 'Preventing Future Infections' project is funded by the World Hepatitis Alliance, made possible with funding from Kedrion SPA.

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MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

ALLIANCE FOR PUBLIC HEALTH

Ukraine's Alliance for Public Health (APH) became a member of WHA in 2025. In cooperation with state partners and civil society organisations, the organisation provides financial and technical support to programmes covering more than 250,000 people from underrepresented populations – higher coverage than any other initiative of its kind in Europe.

Background

APH was originally founded in 2000 as the International HIV/AIDS Alliance in Ukraine. By November 2015, had changed their name to better reflect their work across various intersecting diseases in Ukraine.

APH's mission has always been to improve the health and quality of life of underserved communities, developing and delivering public health and crisis response interventions that are innovative and "built on principles of person-centeredness, inclusivity, human rights, and sustainability."

Programmes

APH's work in hepatitis began in 2012, when they launched a comprehensive package of hepatitis C treatment for people who use drugs and patient education through social workers.

Since then, they have become a pioneer in hepatitis C treatment in Ukraine, introducing the country's first treatment programme using direct-acting antiviral drugs in 2016; a diagnosis and treatment programme for people in prisons in 2017; and integrated treatment for people with tuberculosis in 2021.

APH have also introduced technological advances to the country. They began using Gene-Xpert equipment for diagnostics in 2021, with reagents supplied directly to medical laboratories. Two years later, they initiated the first use of Xpert® HCV VL Fingerstick technology in Ukraine, allowing treatment to start within an hour of positive diagnosis.

Changing landscapes

APH's work has been under constant pressure to adapt since the Russia-Ukraine war began in 2022, leading them to launch extensive decentralisation of treatment across 57 healthcare facilities in 16 regions. With the support of 14 other NGOs, the groups find hepatitis C cases, refer people for diagnosis and treatment, and provide individual support, achieving an astonishing 99% treatment completion rate and 98% successful cure rate. In 2024, APH piloted a similar task-shifting project to reallocate hepatitis C treatment among people who use drugs to NGOs, achieving a 100% treatment success rate.

Recognising what they can contribute to the world from these experiences, the organisation remains committed to its mission beyond Ukraine's borders, too. Watch a video of hepatitis testing in Kyrgyzstan by APH, as part of World Hepatitis Testing Week 2025, **here**.

Viral hepatitis presents a tremendous challenge, especially in countries with a high disease burden, such as those with low or middle incomes. To eliminate hepatitis C, we must focus on the patients and enable them to start treatment on the same day as a positive test. Today, this is possible and we are expanding such programmes in Ukraine and worldwide."

Tetiana Deshko, Director of the International Programmes Department, APH

We asked APH for three things they are most proud of in their hepatitis work:

1. "Directly providing 2,500 hepatitis C treatment courses in Ukraine throughout the four years of the ongoing war."
2. "Developing **Harm Reduction Academy**, an international, university-accredited training and capacity building course focused on hepatitis C and HIV. This has so far trained more than 100 medical workers, local government members, CSOs, community groups, and police officers in 20 countries."
3. "Initiating **HCV Innovate Involve Inspire**, together with Frontline AIDS and supported by Unitaid. This project is introducing an innovative hepatitis C testing and treatment model for people who use drugs in Egypt, Kyrgyzstan (with the Partner Network Association), and Nigeria (with DAPHO). A total of 1,450 people are expected to be treated by the programme."

APH's plans for 2026:

"We are currently seeking funding to conduct more integrated screening and innovative near/point of care hepatitis B and C diagnostics in mobile clinics across Ukraine and Eastern Europe and Central Asia."

HEP-VOICES INTERVIEW

RICHARD’S STORY

Richard Smith is a caregiver and advocate whose life has been shaped by the challenges of hepatitis B. Diagnosed with the virus in 2009, he supports his family through serious illnesses while promoting awareness, community care, and compassion, finding strength in singing and helping others navigate similar health journeys.

If someone wrote a book about your life, what would it be called?

I’m not too sure of the title, but I can say it would be interesting. It would entail details about a troubled childhood, dealing with racism, being homeless as a teen in Detroit. Living my best life in Hawaii and, for a short period, San Francisco. Then moving back to Michigan to take care of my mom after her liver transplant, and my aunt after her liver and kidney transplants.

How would your best friend describe you in 3 words?

Reliable, smart aleck, kind.

When and how did you first find out you were living with hepatitis? What do you remember most about that moment?

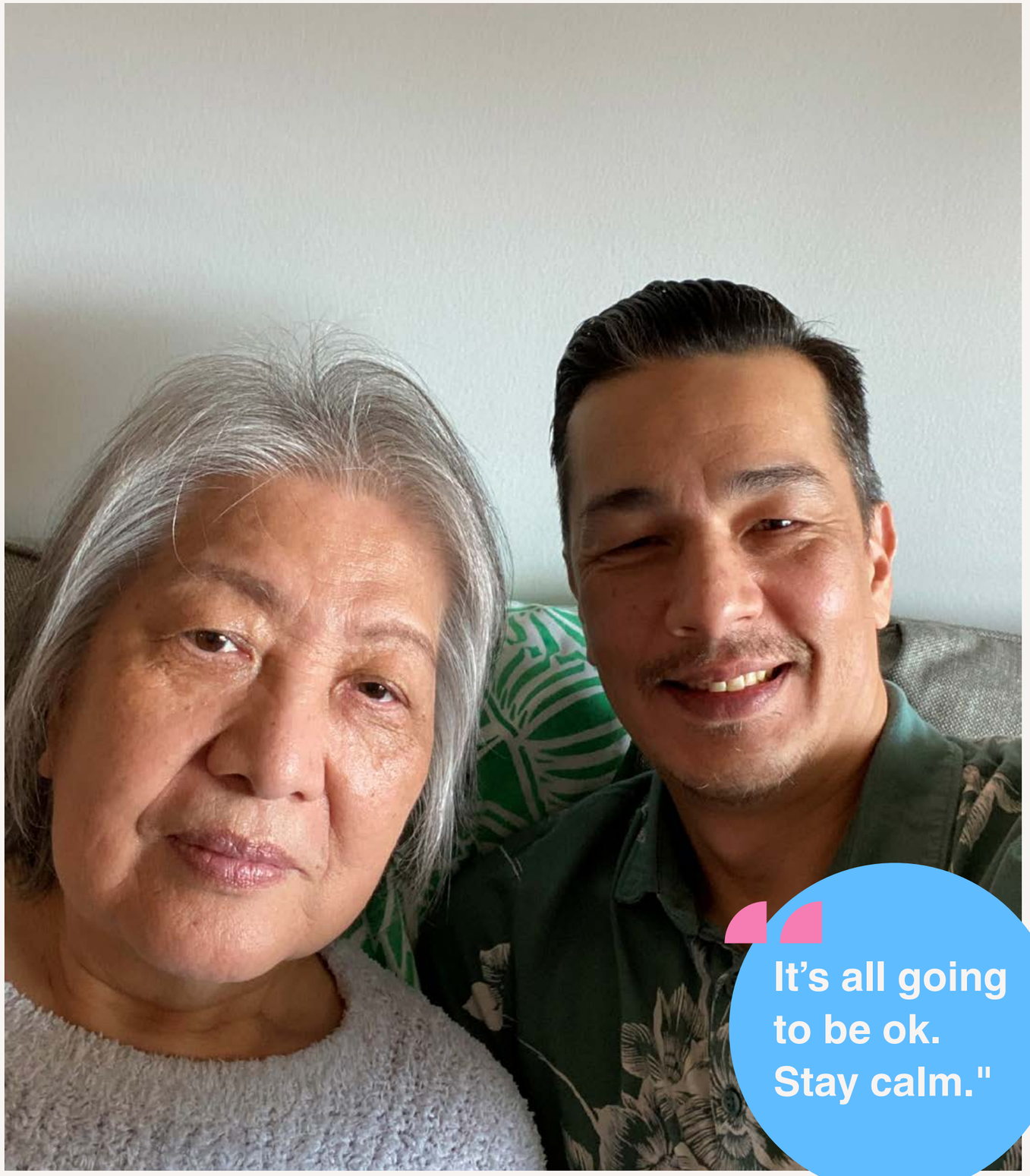
Finding out I had hep B is a day I will never forget. It was 2009, during a stressful period with my aunt when she started going through liver failure. She was hospitalised due to complications from her infection, which she hadn’t been diagnosed with until then. The whole family was being tested for possible living donor matching. I was living in Hawaii at the time, while she was up in Detroit, and I went to my primary physician to get all the testing done. A few days later, I received a call from my doctor asking me when I was going to tell her I had hepatitis B. I was shocked and scared, seeing what my aunt was going through, finding out I had the same condition, thinking: this could be me in the future.

If you could go back in time and give yourself advice at that moment, what would you say?

It’s all going to be ok. Stay calm.

What’s one thing you wish more people would understand about hepatitis?

I’m not sure if I could pin it down to just one thing. Top 3: One, this isn’t



Above: Richard's mother (Okpun) and Richard

something I got from contaminated water/food or drug use. Two, the hepatitis B vaccine works and is necessary. And three, being that so many people affected by hepatitis B are non-native English speakers, we need more and better access to skilled translation services and easily accessible material.

What's one thing that brings you joy, no matter what's going on in your life?

Singing and helping others. Being part of a choir has been part of my stress relief while caring for my mom and my aunt. The choir is also an organisation that gives back to the community.

Has hepatitis ever led you to discover something unexpected – about yourself, your strength or even a new passion?

When my mom had all the complications after her liver transplant, I didn't think I would be able to do half of what we had to do. Mind you, we had a pandemic still going when she had these complications. It forced me to have to "become her nurse". Cooking, caring for her, all the medications, home infusion, checking her vitals, being her voice…

What do you do and what does your work involve?

Currently I am on disability; I can't work, due to chronic pain and back issues. So my main job is looking after mom and aunty.

Left: Richard (eighth from the left) and his choir

Who has been your biggest supporter in your journey?

HepFree Hawaii have been probably the best support ever (shout out to Thaddeus Pham, but the entire organisation is awesome). Getting to know this group and being involved with them has helped with my journey, as well as advice on my mom and aunt's conditions. The massive support they have given me has allowed me to grow, become more comfortable with myself, and become a voice for those who need it.

How do you think attitudes towards hepatitis are changing in your community – if at all?

I feel as though there has been great progress in treatment of hepatitis in the US, but mainly hepatitis C – not as much for hepatitis B, especially here in Michigan.

What's something you're looking forward to in the next year?

The choir I'm in is singing with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra for Disney Pride.

A diagnosis of hepatitis should not carry any stigma. By raising awareness, we promote early education, testing, and treatment...

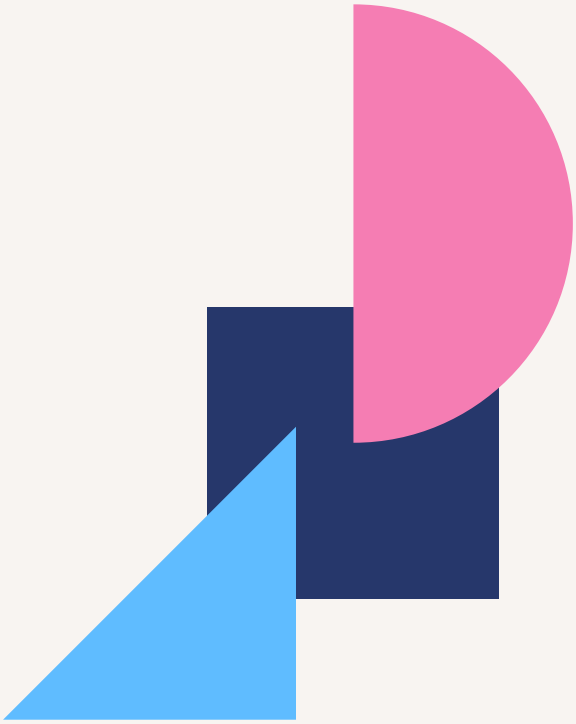
What's one thing you'd like to say to others living with hepatitis?

Hepatitis isn't something I'd wish on anyone, not even an enemy.

I've faced some of the toughest complications from hepatitis while caring for family members. My treatment was relatively straightforward: it involved using both Entecavir and Descovy (the latter serving as PrEP and for TDF to treat the HBV). But two of my family members underwent transplants because of the hepatitis B virus' effects.

My mother received a liver transplant, while her sister needed both liver and kidney transplants due to complications. Each went through unique challenges before and after surgery, including cancer and extended hospital stays due to sepsis and neurological issues. Fortunately, they survived, but these experiences profoundly changed both their lives and our whole family dynamic. My path shifted dramatically, from managing restaurants in Hawaii to becoming a caregiver in Michigan.

To individuals living with hepatitis: remain confident, share your experiences, and seek mutual support within the community. A diagnosis of hepatitis should not carry any stigma. By raising awareness, we promote early education, testing, and treatment – critical measures for saving lives and reducing suffering.



The Magazine

World Hepatitis Alliance

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