

Texas Passes Extensive Hep C Legislation

The burden of hepatitis C infections in Texas is staggering. It is estimated that between 300,000 to 500,000 persons in Texas are infected with hepatitis C. At this time, health officials estimate that approximately 200,000 HCV positive people in Texas need to be treated for hepatitis C.

In 1999, the Texas legislator passed Bill 1652, a comprehensive HCV bill that included public and professional education, screenings and counseling. This bill allocated \$3.5 million beginning January 1, 2000 and is now a line item until it is increased. All screening sites were up and running by October 2000 in all regions of Texas. This bill was just recently deemed by the National Council of Governments to be the model bill for every state to adopt in addressing Hepatitis C.

This month the Texas legislative passed more Hep C related legislation that will further expand and continue Bill 1652. This bill included a fiscal rider of \$14 million from outside sources for a two-year period.

HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

Bill 338 mandates Texas Department of Health to develop a state plan for the prevention and treatment of hepatitis C in specific demographic groups that are disproportionately affected by HCV, including persons infected with HIV, veterans, racial or ethnic minorities that suffer a higher incidence of HCV, and persons who engage in high risk behavior, such as intravenous drug use. Additionally, the state shall seek input from the public, including members of the public that have HCV, state agencies that provide services to people with HCV and public advocates concerned with HCV issues.

This plan will include and expand on HCV education and prevention programs, conduct further seroprevalence studies, promote community outreach activities, provide information on risk factors, available screening services and the options available for the treatment of HCV. Additionally, the plan will provide training for public health clinic staff on detection, methods of transmission and treatment of hepatitis C as well as promote disease awareness and prevention and development of a prevention program to reduce the risk of HCV transmission.

Bill 768 mandates an interagency coordination council for HIV and HCV from various state agencies. All representatives appointed to the council must be directly involved in policy or program activities related to services for AIDS, HIV and hepatitis.

Bill 767 Training for licensed chemical dependency counselors must include six hours of training during a two-year licensing period relating to HIV, HCV and sexually transmitted diseases.

Bill 2650 establishes continuing educational training for all nurses and nurse aides for not less than 2 hours (EACH TIME THEY RENEW OR APPLY) and applies to a license holder who renews a license on or after June 1, 2002. Furthermore, this board shall recognize, prepare or administer a hepatitis C training component for use in continuing education for nurses including prevention, assessment and treatment of HCV.

“As we were in 1999, we are encouraged by this year’s legislative actions in Texas to lead the nation in addressing hepatitis C”, states Sharon Phillips, President of Hep C Advocate Network, Inc, (HepCAN). “Our Austin legislators take hepatitis C very seriously in this state and are acting immediately with laws and dollars for the citizens living with HCV. Working together, we can do this in every state, one state at a time.”

Online: <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/> - to view history of bill ask go to Texas legislation and type in the bill number.