

MAY/JUNE 2021: VOL 51

hepVOICE

Your magazine from the World Hepatitis Alliance

HEPATITIS CAN'T WAIT!



World Hepatitis Day
28 July 2021

#WorldHepatitisDay
worldhepatitisday.org

**World Hepatitis
Alliance**

Welcome to hepVoice



The World Hepatitis Alliance (WHA) is delighted to launch the “Hepatitis Can’t Wait” campaign, calling for urgent action in order to reach the targets for hepatitis elimination. The new campaign will be the theme for World Hepatitis Day 2021. In this edition, we will show the need for action on hepatitis and explain how you can get involved with the campaign. Read more on page 10.

In the past few weeks, the World Health Organization (WHO) has released new data highlighting the progress that has been made towards the 2030 elimination targets. This data shows that we are not on track and that progress has been limited. Policy makers can't wait to act on tackling hepatitis. Read more on page 18.

In May, the World Health Assembly agreed on the creation of a new global health strategy for viral hepatitis. This new document will be a reaffirmation by WHO Member States of their promise to eliminate hepatitis. It is clear that action will be needed in order to reach this goal. Read more on page 20.

Hepatitis Can’t Wait.



Cary James,

WHA Chief Executive

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Want to contribute?

We welcome your contributions so please get in touch at contact@worldhepatitisalliance.org to have your news and stories included in future issues and feel free to share this magazine with your network.

hep HEADLINES

Hepatitis is regularly making the news. Here are a few highlights from around the world.

US President releases Presidential proclamation on hepatitis



The President of the United States of America, Joe Biden, issued a presidential proclamation regarding hepatitis on May 19 (National Hepatitis Testing Day in the US). In the proclamation, he encourages all Americans to join in activities that will increase awareness about viral hepatitis and increase hepatitis testing.

The proclamation comes in response to

the significant toll that viral hepatitis has had on the nation's health and the impact of hepatitis stigma and discrimination among those affected.

The presidential proclamation reaffirms the government's commitment to ensuring that everyone knows their viral hepatitis status, that they have access to high quality care and treatment and that they can live free from stigma and discrimination.

[Read more here.](#)

WHO launches interim guidance for country validation for elimination of viral hepatitis

The World Health Organization (WHO) has developed interim

guidance for countries and other stakeholders seeking validation when it comes to the elimination of viral hepatitis as a public health threat. The guidance provides a global framework for the processes and standards for the validation of elimination, proposing the use of absolute impact targets to validate elimination at a national level.



The interim guidance will be replaced by the new Global Health Sector Strategy (GHSS) on viral hepatitis, which



will be published in 2022.

[Read more here.](#)

Improving care of migrants is key for viral hepatitis elimination in Europe

In research published by the World Health Organization, Jin Un et al. offer evidence of the importance of treating viral hepatitis in migrant populations in order to achieve hepatitis elimination in Europe. Although European countries host many migrants from areas where viral

hepatitis is endemic, this underserved population is often excluded from national hepatitis plans and are unable to access testing and treatment. According to the paper, political and health strategies need to be adapted to meet these challenges and to help eliminate viral hepatitis globally.

[Read more here.](#)

Hepatitis B Foundation launches registry of discrimination against people living with hepatitis B

[Read more here.](#)

The Hepatitis B Foundation has launched the Hepatitis B Discrimination Registry, the first global database allowing people around the world to confidentially document their hepatitis B related discrimination experiences anonymously. The registry's data will be used to develop policy and advocacy efforts, which are intended to eliminate hepatitis B-related discrimination in the future.

Participating in a hepatitis related activity or have an event planned?
Email us on contact@worldhepatitisalliance.org or contact us on social media.

Key advocacy dates

Upcoming events and activities taking place in the coming months.

18–20 June Global Hepatitis Summit

The Global Hepatitis Summit 2021 will bring together top clinicians and researchers from around the world in a four-day digital conference. Under the theme “Evolution and Revolution of Viral Hepatitis and Liver Disease” this intensive and vibrant scientific event will hold many learning opportunities for all participants in every current aspect of hepatitis development. [Learn more.](#)

23–26 June International Liver Congress 2021

The European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL) is hosting the International Liver Congress (ILC 2021), an innovative and engaging digital event for the global liver community to connect and learn via cutting-edge content. ILC 2021 will be a renewed opportunity for the global liver community to connect and join forces to beat liver disease. For the first time ever, ILC will take place on the e-learning platform, EASL Campus.
[Learn more.](#)

28 July World Hepatitis Day

World Hepatitis Day is an annual event aimed at raising awareness of viral hepatitis in order to influence real change. With a person dying every 30 seconds from a hepatitis related illness – even in the current COVID-19 crisis – we “can’t wait” to act on viral hepatitis. Visit the [World Hepatitis Day website](#)

to find out more about our new “Hepatitis Can’t Wait” campaign and learn how you can get involved. Don’t forget to use #WorldHepatitisDay on social media to help us reach as many people as possible.

9 August International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples

There are an estimated 370 million Indigenous people in the world, living across 90 countries. They make up less than five percent of the planet’s population, but account for 15 percent of the world’s most poor. Indigenous peoples are also disproportionately affected by viral hepatitis and may be up to 10 times more likely to be living with viral hepatitis than the general population in their respective countries. Use #IndigenousDay to help raise awareness and to demand that no one – including Indigenous peoples – is left behind in the race to eliminate viral hepatitis.



NOhep Village returns to GHS

We are very pleased to announce that NOhep Village is returning to this year's Global Hepatitis Summit (GHS), as a virtual symposium. Organised in collaboration with the Coalition to Eradicate Viral Hepatitis in Asia Pacific (CEVHAP), the symposium will focus on how civil society and the scientific community can work better together in order to achieve elimination.

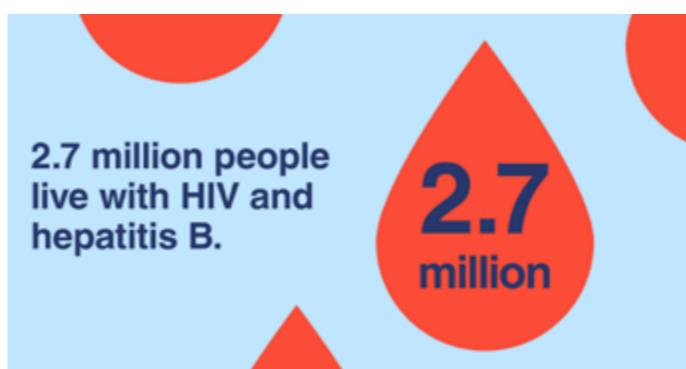
Under the theme "Elimination in action – Stories from the Frontline," we will bring together members of civil society organisations, alongside medical professionals, in order to exchange experiences in both programme implementation and service delivery. We will be joined by hepatitis advocates, academics and healthcare professionals from all over the world, who will be sharing stories of elimination efforts in their home countries.

**Join us for the two-day NOhep Village Symposium from 18-19 June 2021.
[Register now!](#)**



UN Political Declaration on HIV commits to hepatitis support

The United Nations hosted a High-Level Meeting (HLM) on HIV/AIDS from 8 - 10 June 2021. At the conclusion of the meeting, countries signed a political declaration on HIV reaffirming their commitments to ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030.



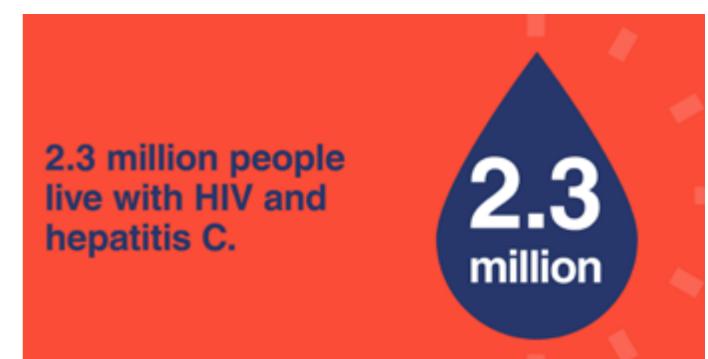
In the document, hepatitis integration is included in several areas, including maternal health interventions, harm reduction services, and services targeting those living with hepatitis co-infection. Across the world, 2.3 million people live with both HIV and hepatitis C and 2.7 million people live with both HIV and hepatitis B.

The World Hepatitis Alliance (WHA) and our network of over 300 organisations in 100 countries, welcomes the inclusion of viral hepatitis within the 2021 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS. Viral hepatitis and HIV often disproportionately affect the same

communities. Targeted interventions to help prevent, diagnose, and treat hepatitis and HIV are crucial in ensuring the communities most underserved by health systems are not left behind as we look to tackle these epidemics.

Now is the time to turn these commitments into equitable action on hepatitis elimination. Communities affected by viral hepatitis are often left unable to receive the care they need. We call on global funders to support countries in integrating services; particularly in the areas of maternal health and harm reduction services. By taking a person-centred approach to healthcare, with civil society and the affected community playing a central role, we can win the fight against HIV and hepatitis together.

Hepatitis Can't Wait. We must act now.





World Hepatitis Summit 2022

BANGKOK, THAILAND
JUNE 8-10 2022



World Hepatitis
Alliance

The World Hepatitis Alliance (WHA) is pleased to announce that the World Hepatitis Summit (WHS) will return in 2022 with a hybrid meeting. This will combine an in-person event for those able to attend along with a virtual option for those unable to travel. The three-day summit will take place in Bangkok, Thailand, from June 8-10, with a one-day pre-conference meeting exclusively for WHA members held on 7 June.

The WHS is the only global hepatitis conference focused on public health and hepatitis elimination. The summit in 2022, co-sponsored by the World Health Organization (WHO) and organised by WHA, will bring together the international hepatitis community for an unrivalled opportunity to focus on implementing the viral hepatitis response. By bringing together civil society and community organisations, people with lived experience and the affected community, health ministers, clinicians and programme managers, WHS 2022 will drive progress to make the elimination of viral hepatitis by 2030 a reality.

“With COVID-19 resulting in radical disruption to health systems and the global health agenda increasingly focussing on Universal Health Coverage (UHC), WHS 2022 will explore the challenges and opportunities for hepatitis programmes within these evolving health systems.

Cary James, WHA CEO

WHS 2022 will be the third World Hepatitis Summit; preceding summits were WHS 2015 held in Glasgow, Scotland and WHS 2017 held in São Paolo, Brazil. Previous summits were landmark events in the global hepatitis response.

The theme will be "Achieving The Elimination Of Viral Hepatitis Within Evolving Health Systems". Countries will have reported against the 2020 targets and with less than 10 years to go until the 2030 targets, it is likely that most countries will need to accelerate their efforts in addressing hepatitis A, B, C, D and E across the cascade of care. Further, these discussions will need to be had within the framework of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and the reshaping of health systems amidst the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure a response which is integrated and sustainable.

WHS 2022 will accelerate progress towards hepatitis elimination in the face of COVID-19. With less than a decade to go to reach the 2030 elimination targets, it has never been more important to bring the hepatitis community together again.

Registration and calls for abstracts will open in the coming months.

For more information, including sponsorship packages, and to register your interest please visit www.worldhepatitissummit.org





New report highlights global progress on reducing viral hepatitis

A new report released by the World Health Organization (WHO), highlights both the achievements and the gaps in the implementation of the Global Health Sector Strategy on Viral Hepatitis from 2016–2021. It also outlines key steps which need to be taken in order to eliminate hepatitis as a public health threat by 2030.

The new report contains estimates for viral hepatitis, which highlight how most targets had not been met by 2020, even before the COVID-19 pandemic struck. New data shows that hepatitis B and C caused three million new infections and 1.1 million one

deaths in 2019. Only 10% of people who are living with the hepatitis B virus are diagnosed, with only 22% of them receiving treatment. For hepatitis C, just 21% of people are diagnosed, with 62% of them receiving treatment. Despite some progress towards the 2020 hepatitis targets, the challenges in achieving the 2030 goals are enormous.

There have however been some important success stories. The reduction in the incidence of hepatitis B is one of the few health targets amongst the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that is on track. In addition, new data shows that 9.4 million people are receiving treatment for chronic hepatitis C virus infection, which is more than a ninefold increase since 2015.

“The accountability report would have looked very different a year ago, before COVID-19”, says Dr Meg Doherty, Director of WHO’s Department of Global HIV, Hepatitis and STI Programmes. “Our progress to date demonstrates that we have the interventions and approaches to make a great impact and build back stronger against COVID-19, HIV, viral hepatitis, and STIs. The report is a call to action – we have nine years to reach our SDG targets – we need all stakeholders to accelerate action across the three diseases, in order to achieve our ambitious yet achievable goals by 2030.”

WHA commentary

This new report offers a mixed picture. On the one hand we can take heart from the progress that is being made, especially in the reduction of incidences of hepatitis B. The increase in the number of people being able to access treatment for hepatitis C is also a step in the right direction. However, there are also glaring gaps in the progress and governments have been slow in their responses. While 300,000 fewer people are dying from viral hepatitis annually, that still leaves 1.1 million people dying each year, despite the availability of a vaccine and treatments for hepatitis B and a cure for hepatitis C.

In order to reach the elimination targets, there needs to be a six-fold

increase in access to hepatitis C Direct Acting Antivirals (DAAs). Despite significant price drops in the costs of DAAs, they remain unavailable to thousands of people worldwide; especially those from low-resource settings, or from the communities underserved by healthcare systems.

It is clear that a concerted effort is needed to get us on track to reach the elimination targets. The COVID-19 pandemic will have put us further behind. Action is needed from all stakeholders and right now. Hepatitis can’t wait to be addressed, people living with hepatitis can’t wait for diagnosis, prevention interventions, including harm reduction and hepatitis B vaccination, can’t wait to be scaled up and lives can’t wait to be saved.

The report also highlights the countries that aren’t waiting. Egypt has gone from the country with the highest global burden of hepatitis C to being the first country looking to validate the elimination of hepatitis C. Mongolia, Pakistan and Georgia are also increasing progress towards hepatitis elimination, but many more countries need to accelerate their programmes. We can eliminate viral hepatitis within the next nine years, but it will take concerted efforts from all parties to get there. Now is the time for action.

Hepatitis Can’t Wait.

The World Health Assembly adopts decision to create new global health sector strategy on viral hepatitis

The World Health Assembly, the decision-making body of the World Health Organization (WHO) has pledged to create a new Global Health Sector Strategy (GHSS) on viral hepatitis.

The first GHSS, which was created in 2016 (covering the period 2016–2021), committed to the elimination of viral hepatitis by 2030. The new GHSS will look to build on the progress made towards elimination and accelerate action across the world. The new GHSS will also look to integrate strategies to tackle HIV and STI's, in order to achieve the elimination of all three disease areas within a decade.

The World Hepatitis Alliance, an official non-state actors to WHO, submitted an intervention into the

discussion, reaffirming the need to involve civil society in the creation, governance and implementation of the GHSS and national elimination strategies.

"The new GHSS will be presented at the 75th World Health Assembly in 2022."

The new GHSS will be presented at the 75th World Health Assembly in 2022 and will be a pillar of discussion at the World Hepatitis Summit in June 2022.

Have your say on the new strategy by completing the on-line consultation

Only 43%

of newborns worldwide receive hepatitis B birth dose vaccination*



3x

Hepatitis C treatment needs to increase threefold to reach the 2030 elimination targets*

WHA statement on the new GHSS

The World Hepatitis Alliance (WHA) with over 300 members in 100 countries, welcomes the development of a new global health sector strategy for viral hepatitis.

Viral hepatitis is one of the deadliest health crises of our time, claiming more than 1.1 million lives every year. The tools to prevent, diagnose and treat viral hepatitis are readily available. With a low-cost vaccine and treatments for hepatitis B and a cure for hepatitis C, WHO's goal of eliminating viral hepatitis by 2030 is achievable. "Hepatitis Can't Wait" any longer for action. Less than half of WHO member states have reported having viral hepatitis plans in place and lives continue to be unnecessarily lost due to hepatitis.

"Viral hepatitis is one of the deadliest health crises of our time, claiming more than 1.1 million lives every year."

A new Global Health Sector Strategy for viral hepatitis, is a vital tool for holding countries accountable to their commitments to reach elimination. Realistic and achievable testing and treatment targets can help find the

290 million people who are unaware they are living with viral hepatitis and link them to the care they need. Prevention targets can stop more lives being affected by viral hepatitis through harm reduction services and the prevention of mother-to-child transmission.

"The populations most impacted by viral hepatitis are often those most underserved by health systems."

The populations most impacted by viral hepatitis are often those most underserved by health systems. Civil society and the affected community are a critical catalyst to ensure that no one is left behind and must be central to the new strategy. They must be equitable partners in the planning, implementation, monitoring and governance of hepatitis elimination programmes and services everywhere.

WHA stand ready to support WHO in the development of the new global health strategy and is committed to tirelessly working towards its success. WHA looks forward to working with WHO on World Hepatitis Day (July 28 2021), with the theme "Hepatitis Can't Wait," which calls for urgent action on viral hepatitis elimination.

only 10%

of people living with hepatitis B know their status*



only 21%

of people living with hepatitis C know their status*

HEPATITIS CAN'T WAIT



'Hepatitis Can't Wait' is the new campaign theme for World Hepatitis Day (WHD) 2021, bringing WHA and its global network of over 300 members in nearly 100 countries together to lead the campaign internationally.

The Hepatitis Can't Wait campaign is a great new advocacy platform for activists, civil society and the affected community to use to reach decision makers, policy makers and those in power.

Launched in May 2021 the Hepatitis Can't Wait highlights the need to accelerate hepatitis elimination efforts. For too long hepatitis elimination efforts have been underfunded, under prioritised and under resourced. The COVID-19 pandemic has put us back even further from the progress we were making to achieve the elimination of viral hepatitis by 2030, the target set by the World Health Organization in 2016.

With Hepatitis Can't Wait we will raise our collective voices to call for urgent action for the people affected by hepatitis across the world. Alongside this, it will also highlight the social injustice and inequity caused by the lack of action on hepatitis elimination and focus on the positive action needed to get on track to meet the 2030 elimination goals.

World Hepatitis Day is our day to raise awareness of viral hepatitis. We aim to unite the global community to demand action from decision makers globally to prioritise the elimination of viral hepatitis. We aim to:

- 1. Raise awareness of viral hepatitis**
- 2. Communicate the urgent need for action on hepatitis now**
- 3. Reveal the social injustice caused by the lack of action on viral hepatitis**
- 4. Raise the voices of the people and communities affected by viral hepatitis to demand positive action and fight stigma**
- 5. Celebrate the global community combating hepatitis around the world**
- 6. Call on policymakers, decision makers and global funders to join the fight to eliminate hepatitis**

WE CAN'T WAIT TO ACT

! HEP
CAN'T
WAIT!

With a person dying
every 30 seconds from a
hepatitis related illness
– even in the current
COVID-19 crisis – we
can't wait to act on
viral hepatitis.

-  People living with viral hepatitis unaware
can't wait for testing
-  People living with hepatitis **can't wait** for
life saving treatments
-  Expectant mothers **can't wait** for hepatitis
screening and treatment
-  Newborn babies **can't wait** for birth
dose vaccination
-  People affected by hepatitis **can't wait**
to end stigma and discrimination
-  Community organisations **can't wait**
for greater investment
-  Decision makers **can't wait** and must act
now to make hepatitis elimination a reality
through political will and funding.

The campaign will frame the fight against viral hepatitis as the fight for equity, human rights and social justice while focusing on positive action. The campaign will be proactive, empowering and focused on a positive future.



GET INVOLVED

For more ideas on how to get involved visit worldhepatitisday.org or download Hepatitis Can't Wait campaign guidelines

One minute actions



Take to social media and share one of our downloadable social media graphics with your followers. Don't forget to tag us with #WorldHepatitisDay to join the online conversation.



Send one of our graphics to your contacts via Whatsapp and encourage them to join the campaign.



Sign the pledge on our microsite to join our mailing list to receive further information and updates throughout the campaign.



Use Instagram's reels function to create a 30 second story/reel. Use the #WorldHepatitisDay hashtag and add a WHD and Hep Can't Wait GIF sticker to tag and share across channels.



Add a Hep Can't Wait branded frame to your Facebook profile picture to promote the campaign and WHD itself.



Point to the time/watch/clock and share the photo/video on social media on WHD to show your support. Use the hashtag #WorldHepatitisDay and Instagram story stickers.



Watch a video from our 30 second mini series 'What is...?' and share on social with friends and followers.

Ten minute actions



Create a poster to put up at your local community centre, in your workplace or place of worship to raise awareness. You could also encourage pharmacists and medical professionals to display a poster in their pharmacy, clinic or hospital.



Apply to light up a local landmark green in support of WHD.



Longer actions

Join our virtual global relay by submitting a 30 second video explaining what the elimination of viral hepatitis means to you. Use the hashtags #WorldHepatitisDay and #WHDRelay as well as tag us @worldhepatitisalliance and relevant organisations. People can share, explore and track posts throughout the day. These videos will be shown throughout World Hepatitis Day on the World Hepatitis Alliance social media channels.

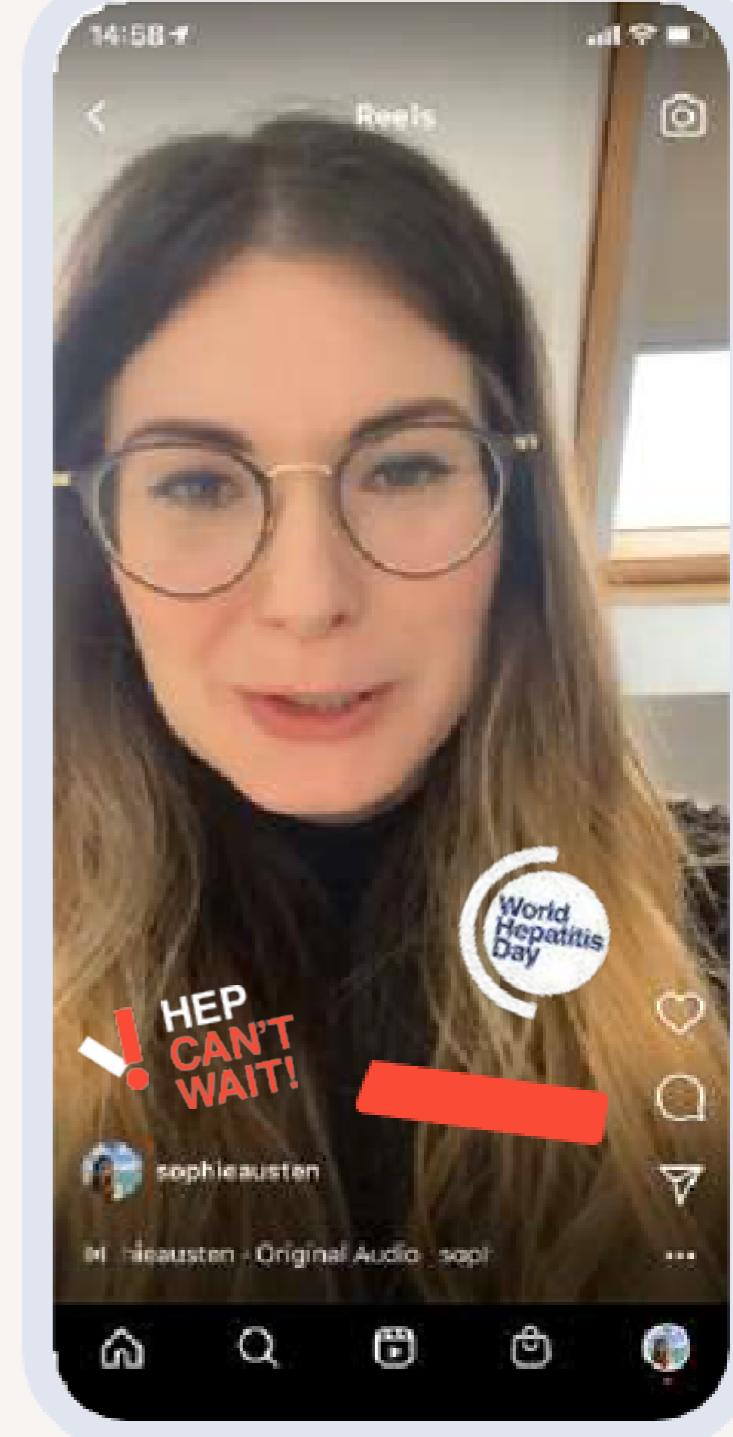


Ask your local billboard owners for advertising space to raise awareness of hepatitis on World Hepatitis Day.



Hold an event or webinar to raise awareness of viral hepatitis.

Create your video message to join our virtual relay and show support for WHD



Create your own Instagram reel to share on social channels.

WEBINAR SERIES



In July we will be hosting three webinars focusing on key topics in hepatitis elimination.

Webinar one: Hepatitis Can't Wait- accelerating elimination

With so few countries on track to achieve hepatitis elimination by 2030 – we can't wait to accelerate action toward this goal. Register for our roundtable discussion that will explore how we can generate momentum through innovation, prioritisation, collaboration and overcome the long-standing barriers that have stood in our way. Discussion areas will include:

- Overcoming the persistent barriers to testing, treatment and prevention
- Empowering people affected by hepatitis to fight stigma and discrimination and to drive change by decision-makers
- Accelerating the decentralisation of services to bring them closer to the communities that need them
- Accelerating hepatitis elimination through cancer prevention, reduction of non-communicable diseases and the transformation to universal health coverage (UHC).



Date: 6 July 2021



Time: 1pm London time (8am New York, 9am Sao Paulo, 2pm Geneva, 5:30pm Delhi, 8pm Shanghai, 10pm Sydney)

[Register now](#)

Dates and details for webinars **Policymakers Can't Wait** and **Youth Can't Wait** are coming soon. Stay up to date at [WHA website](#).

DON'T WAIT TAKE ACTION



contact@worldhepatitisalliance.org
[#HepCantWait](#)

We're not waiting

Civil society organisations have not been waiting to take action on hepatitis and have been driving the hepatitis response globally. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic civil society organisations have shown how they are able to adapt their services to meet the needs of the community.

We sat down with SIDC Lebanon, a non-profit organisation based in Lebanon, to hear about how they have been working with their communities to meet the organisation's mission of building a safe and healthy society free of stigma and discrimination, where human rights are fully respected.

What services do you provide to your community?

We provide harm reduction and healthcare services, advocacy, networking, psychological support, awareness and peer to peer education to at-risk individuals, and capacity building for NGOs at the national and regional level. Our beneficiaries include adolescents and youth, sex workers, the LGBTQ+ community,

people who inject drugs, people in prison, migrants and asylum seekers, care workers and the general public.

How did you serve your community during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The lockdown has made it difficult to continue our awareness-raising activities, especially with hard to reach groups. We organised a mobile unit led by a group of peers. We drove to hotspots where people at higher risk of hepatitis are present, for example, people experiencing homelessness and people who inject drugs. We reached out to them and offered rapid hepatitis B and C tests.

Those who tested positive were linked to care in one of our centres, which remained open during the lockdown. We were able to provide treatment through the Ministry of Health and hepatitis B vaccinations to key at-risk populations.

How did you get the idea for the mobile unit?

At the start of the pandemic, Lebanon entered a four-month national lockdown. We initially asked peers to travel on their motorcycle and visit



at risk-populations to stay in touch and distribute clean needles. We tried distributing self-tests as well. However, our community members did not feel comfortable self-administering them, so they waited until the end of lockdown to get tested in one of our centres.

Our centres remained open, but we were initially unable to see new patients, so we had to find a way to maintain connections in the field. This is why we deployed a mobile unit.

How did you approach advocacy change during the pandemic?

We never stopped engaging on social media. We tried reaching out to at-risk communities by developing materials on COVID-19 and drug use to combat misconceptions and online outreach on a dating app. Currently, we are finalising a chatting app that addresses HIV, hepatitis B and C and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). The app will allow users to connect to a trained individual that

can accurately answer their questions and concerns.

We are also involved in research projects where we do studies directly with our communities to develop recommendations based on evidence to serve them better. For example, we participated in a study demonstrating the benefits of hepatitis B vaccination in adults. We used this evidence to engage with the Ministry of Health.

Do you have any recommendations for other organisations in the field?

We recommend that organisations working in the STI space develop programmes specifically focused on hepatitis B and C and keep up advocacy throughout the year and not just on World Hepatitis Day. This way, we can truly make a difference.

For more information about SIDC Lebanon work visit:
www.sidc-lebanon.org

Inspiration from around the world - Tibet

Through the Find the Missing Millions campaign, we are highlighting inspiring work from around the world. This month we hear from Altruism in Action, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) which works on viral hepatitis elimination with exiled Tibetans in remote Himalayan region of India.

By Tsering Palmo, Altruism in Action

Hepatitis B is the second most prevalent life-threatening communicable disease among Tibetans in India, with a prevalence

Achievements to date

Delivered awareness and education training to more than 2,000 students, staff, monks, nuns and members of the general population.

Vaccinated 450 monks, students and staff in the community schools.

Provided hepatitis B screening for 1,050 monks, nuns, students, staff and community personnel.



hepatitis B and appropriate guidance on treatment for hepatitis B was inaccessible, as information was

rate of 12%. A study conducted by the Department of Health of India, the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) in India and the University of Rochester in the UK found that although the hepatitis B rate was higher than the national average, members of the community reported a lack of awareness and about hepatitis B and misconceptions around the causes of transmission. Community members also highlighted that information on

Top tips for success

Individuals living with hepatitis need to feel comfortable to open up and share their problems. Trust, respect, and equality are important, to provide a sense of safety.

Communicate with people in their local language to gain support from local leaders and important personnel.

Collaboration improves the way your team works together and solves many problems.

unavailable in the local language.

"Individuals living with hepatitis need to feel comfortable to open up and share their problems. Trust, respect, and equality are important, to provide a sense of safety."

Altruism in Action founder, Tsering Palmo was brought up in India as a Tibetan refugee. Her mission is to seek a hepatitis-free society and serve as many people who are suffering from other diseases with love, care and dignity. As a result of her work in education and awareness-raising, she has seen a decrease in hepatitis B related stigma and fear in the community.



As well as raising awareness and helping educate people, she works with different organisations and companies to provide free testing and to cover the cost of medicines for people living with hepatitis B.

[Read the full case study here.](#)

Wall of Stories: Jason Crum Escalera

Together, our stories can change the way the world sees viral hepatitis.

Each month we share the story of someone whose life has been affected by viral hepatitis. This month, we share the story of Reverend Jason Crum Escalera, a Hepatitis B Foundation storyteller dedicated to sharing his story in order to raise awareness and help others living with hepatitis B.

"I was first diagnosed with hepatitis B in 2011. I was already living with HIV, so I was facing a burden of living with two viruses. I did not have any knowledge of hepatitis B, all I was told is that I have a liver virus.

My first physician was familiar with HIV and hepatitis C co-infection, but not with HIV and hepatitis B co-infection. I was prescribed too much medication, which caused acid to build up in my kidneys. I had to travel 290 miles on a monthly basis, just to see a hepatologist. Despite the hardships, I considered myself lucky because so many people don't have access to a hepatologist.

I decided to be proactive and gather

information about the virus myself. I attended harm reduction groups, gathered information through the medical journal platform Medline and talked to various doctors. Finally, I came across the Hepatitis B Foundation.

When I first became a Hepatitis B Foundation storyteller, I thought I was just going to talk about my hepatitis. I didn't know that throughout this process I was going to have to strip myself down and build myself back up, so that others can see my past and my reality of living with my hepatitis B and HIV co-infection. It was a life changer throughout. I don't know what my life would have been like have I not shared my story.

"Hopefully, in some part of the world someone's life has changed because I shared my truth."

Because I became a storyteller, I was blessed to meet other people who are like me. My story is posted online and the videos are available in several

different languages, so that people around the world can identify with it or learn from it. Hopefully, in some part of the world someone's life has changed because I shared my truth. It is important to me that at least one person who watched the video was inspired to learn their status. The storytellers serve to open the door and start a conversation.

"Worldwide we have to empower each other, regardless of our culture, language and location."

To anyone living with hepatitis B, who is considering sharing their story but might be afraid – it is not about you. It is about someone hearing what you have gone through and what you are going through, so they can be educated and influenced to take a test. There isn't enough conversation about hepatitis B, because the stigma is so heavy. It is important to be truthful, because everyone who is living with hepatitis B should feel like they are not alone. Today I have a level of peace and joy, because I know I am helping people. I would tell



anybody living with hepatitis B to go full throttle and tell their truth.

I am committed to sharing my story, because it's not about me, it's about saving someone's life – about not being ashamed of who I am and not being ashamed of my virus. I have the virus, but the virus doesn't have me. I see storytellers as being the voice for the voiceless. Worldwide we have to empower each other, regardless of our culture, language and location. I hope that one day every general practitioner and every specialist will have knowledge of hepatitis B,

so nobody has to go through what I went through. Ultimately, the patients are the ones that pay the price through a lack of knowledge and stigma.

"We need World Hepatitis Day, because it gives people living with hepatitis more freedom to talk about their condition."

We need World Hepatitis Day, because it gives people living with hepatitis more freedom to talk about their condition. There was a time when people didn't talk about hepatitis B and it was so stigmatised that people wouldn't even talk about it with their doctor. World Hepatitis Day means more freedom to talk about it and more freedom to live with it; regardless of the stigma and ignorance that plagues it. It is a day that people can motivate others, create awareness and celebrate knowledge, celebrate health.

So many people died without knowing that they had it. They didn't have the chance to fight. So many people died because they thought they have it, but they were too afraid to get tested, not wanting to

be judged. World Hepatitis Day is a day of celebration, a day to reflect on how far we have come since we started and to see how far we still have to go. I hope that on every World Hepatitis Day, we take a moment to reflect on all those who lost the battle because they didn't have the tools to fight. Every day it's about testing, awareness and reflection.



My husband is a great supporter of my ministry and the movement. Not everyone living with hepatitis B has a family so we, the storytellers, have to be their support and sometimes even their family. I spiritually love them and pray for them until they find their voice.

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The other thing that keeps me physically, mentally and spiritually in check is being an ordained minister of Christ. Faith based spirituality is

important and keeps me grounded. I try to live by the words of this song: "Just when I need God he's near. Every time I falter, everytime I fear, God's willing to aid me, God's willing to cheer just when I need God most."

None of this would be made possible if it wasn't for hard working people at the Hepatitis B Foundation. They are the frontrunners of the hepatitis B movement. They are a relatively small organisation but pack a powerful punch, and I wouldn't be where I am without them."



*hep*Voice

**World Hepatitis
Alliance**

www.worldhepatitisalliance.org