**Inaugural Canadian Viral Hepatitis Elimination Day on May 11 calls on government to act now to meet WHO target by 2030**

**Ottawa, ON – April 26, 2022** – A coalition of organizations across Canada is calling on governments to set targets and support critical policy changes to meet its commitment to the World Health Organization (WHO) to eliminate viral hepatitis as a public health threat by 2030.

On Wednesday, May 11, Action Hepatitis Canada, the Canadian Network on Hepatitis C, the Canadian HBV Network, the Canadian Liver Foundation, and the Canadian Association for the Study of the Liver will mark the inaugural Canadian Viral Hepatitis Elimination Day in Ottawa.

“Canadian Viral Hepatitis Elimination Day is about educating people and advocating for policies that will support the elimination of viral hepatitis as a public health threat by 2030,” says Jennifer Nebesky, President and CEO of the Canadian Liver Foundation. “Elimination is within reach, but the sense of urgency and political will seems to be lacking.”

Hepatitis B and C are among Canada’s most burdensome infectious diseases – measured in years of life lost and in costs to our healthcare system. An estimated 230,000 people are living with hepatitis B in Canada, and another 200,000 with hepatitis C. Untreated, viral hepatitis can cause liver damage, cancer, and even death. Hepatitis C is curable once diagnosed, but up to half of those in Canada living with chronic hepatitis C are unaware. Meanwhile, hepatitis B is vaccine preventable and treatable, yet is the leading cause of liver cancer.

Health equity is at the core of the group’s efforts. Systemic inequities impact access to prevention, testing, and treatment, and viral hepatitis disproportionately affects a number of marginalized populations - including Indigenous peoples, some immigrants and newcomers to Canada, people who are incarcerated, people who use drugs, older adults, and gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men.

“We don’t even have national hepatitis B screening guidelines, and current hepatitis C screening guidelines are only risk-based even though we know that three quarters of those who are living with hepatitis C were born between 1945-1975. Up to half of those are undiagnosed. Testing that is based only on risk factors perpetuates the stigma around hepatitis C, and stigma in itself is a big barrier to elimination,” says Dr. Jordan Feld, President of the Canadian Association for the Study of the Liver and a member of the Canadian Network on Hepatitis C. “If you test everyone born in a certain age category you lessen the stigma. That would be a significant and actionable way for government to demonstrate a commitment to models of care that are safe and responsive to marginalized members of society.”

While provinces and territories are accountable to their citizens, the federal government can impact outcomes by demonstrating leadership, action, and urgency through policies that support and drive towards the goal of elimination of viral hepatitis by 2030.

“For example, across Canada, the age at which a hepatitis B vaccine is given is not standardized from province to province. It can vary from birth to age 12. But contracting hepatitis B as an infant can create devastating, lifelong health impacts. That’s why the WHO recommends the hepatitis B vaccine at birth,” notes Carla Coffin, Chair of the Canadian HBV Network.

“As we have seen with COVID, individual efforts cannot curb a viral disease, and some groups will be more harshly impacted than others,” says Jennifer van Gennip, Executive Director of Action Hepatitis Canada. “We must ensure policies are in place to support those who are disproportionately affected by a disease. Elimination is within reach, with targeted government action.”

**About the Canadian Viral Hepatitis Elimination Day coalition**

[Action Hepatitis Canada](https://www.actionhepatitiscanada.ca/) is a pan-Canadian coalition of 72 community organizations, providing accountability for Canada’s commitment to eliminate viral hepatitis as a public health threat by 2030. They are joined in this effort by the [Canadian Liver Foundation](https://www.liver.ca/), the [Canadian Association for the Study of the Liver](https://hepatology.ca/) (CASL), the [Canadian HBV Network](https://canadianhbvnetwork.ca/), and the [Canadian Network on Hepatitis C](https://www.canhepc.ca/en).

Learn more about Canadian Viral Hepatitis Elimination Day at [www.actionhepatitiscanada.ca/canhepday](file:///C:\Users\Jennifer\Downloads\www.actionhepatitiscanada.ca\canhepday)

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