AIDS Institute to States: Lift Barriers to Hepatitis C Treatment!

37 state Medicaid programs continue to restrict access to lifesaving medication—despite medical guidelines telling them not to.

October 29, 2019 By Casey Halter

Public health advocates at the AIDS Institute are calling on 37 state Medicaid directors to lift all remaining treatment barriers for hepatitis C virus (HCV) treatment, arguing that doing so violates public health best practices and Medicaid law, according to a press release from the organization.

The institute sent letters to dozens of Medicaid directors this week urging them to immediately remove restrictions based on liver disease stage and sobriety and to stop requiring that patients see a specialist in order to get a prescription for treatment. The letters not only state that such requirements are technically illegal according to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), but they also cite recent studies showing that providing HCV treatment to all who need it can be cost effective in as little as 16 months.

This isn't a new battle. In 2015, CMS specifically instructed states to remove these access restrictions and move forward with treating as many people with the virus as possible. In response, many states have taken steps to expand treatment; however, many are still failing to comply with federal requirements.

"Rates of hepatitis C are exploding across the country," said Frank Hood, senior policy associate at the AIDS Institute about the organization's reasoning for sending the letters. "When we cure someone of hepatitis C, it means that they can't pass on the virus. Limiting who can access treatment is worsening this public health crisis instead of putting us on the path toward hepatitis C elimination.

The AIDS Institute also sent a copy of each letter to CMS with the hope that the organization will help further enforce federal law and guidance.

To read the AIDS Institute's full statement on the letters, click here.

To learn more about which states continue to restrict access to hepatitis C treatment, click here.

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