

Hepatitis B Foundation launches Hep B Cure Campaign for increased NIH funding

Written by jenny.kimbel@hepb.org
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Unveils a roadmap for a cure to conquer Hepatitis B

DOYLESTOWN, PA (May 24, 2017) — Today, the Hepatitis B Foundation launches its national Hep B Cure Campaign, which features a consensus research agenda that outlines top scientists' priority research recommendations for hepatitis B and liver cancer.

The cure research agenda is highlighted at a Congressional Briefing, hosted by the foundation in collaboration with the Congressional Hepatitis Caucus, Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, U.S. Sen. Mazie Hirono (D-HI) and Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA), and with the support of the National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable and AAPCHO.

The cornerstone of the Hep B Cure Campaign is a consensus research agenda that is contained in reports developed by the Hepatitis B Foundation (HBF), which convened a virtual workshop with more than 30 of the world's leading scientists to determine what research is needed to find a cure for hepatitis B.

The two reports, "A Roadmap for a Cure: Priority Areas for Chronic Hepatitis B and Liver Cancer Research" and "A Research Agenda for Curing Hepatitis B Infection," identify specific research projects in virology, immunology and liver cancer, as well as strategies for expanding clinical research for therapeutic drug testing.

Congresswoman Grace Meng (D-NY) gives a keynote address at the Congressional Briefing.

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“With over 40% of my constituents being Asian Americans, hepatitis B is a priority health issue since it disproportionately impacts these communities,” said Meng.

“This new roadmap for a cure is very exciting and reflects an increasing optimism among the scientific community that a cure for hepatitis B is within reach.”

Congressmen Charles Dent (R-PA) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) also participated in the briefing, demonstrating the bi-partisan nature of national concern for hepatitis B.

In addition, John Ward, M.D., director of the Viral Hepatitis Division at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, speaks about the growing urgency and opportunity for the discovery and development of curative therapies for hepatitis B.

He cited the recent reports from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the U.S. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) declaring that with appropriate action, the elimination of hepatitis B is now possible.

“The time is right for an aggressive and vigorous research campaign to find a cure for hepatitis B because it is a silent but deadly epidemic in the U.S. and worldwide that must be stopped, and with the recent advances in technology, it is a winnable battle,” said Timothy Block, Ph.D., president and co-founder of the Hepatitis B Foundation and its research affiliate, the Baruch S. Blumberg Institute.

Globally, more than 250 million individuals live with chronic hepatitis B infection, which contributes to nearly 800,000 deaths each year, primarily from liver cancer — the second leading cause of cancer deaths worldwide.

In the United States alone, an estimated 2 million Americans are chronically infected with hepatitis B, and liver cancer is not only one of the nation’s deadliest cancers but also the only cancer with rising rates of both incidence and mortality among men and women.

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Despite the magnitude of hepatitis B, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding for hepatitis B is only \$49 million per year and has declined almost 16% since 2012.

An estimated doubling of current NIH research funding for hepatitis B and liver cancer are needed to adequately fund the priority projects identified in HBF's cure research agenda.

By applying these scientific projects to existing NIH research funding mechanisms, a "professional judgment budget" was developed, documenting the need for an additional \$232 million through 2023 to achieve a cure for hepatitis B.

The Hep B Cure Campaign is calling for increased federal investment to accelerate the pace of research for a cure, which will also significantly improve health and economic outcomes.

As part of the campaign, Members of Congress and the scientific leadership at the NIH are being briefed by the HBF on the details of the cure research agenda, and hepatitis B advocates are being mobilized to visit legislators in Washington, D.C. during July to commemorate World Hepatitis Day, as well as schedule meetings with Congressional representatives in their home districts.

"Increased advocacy is necessary to focus national attention on the urgent need for hepatitis B research, with priority given to finding a cure, if we hope to eliminate hepatitis B," said Chari Cohen, DrPH, MPH, director of Public Health of the Hepatitis B Foundation.

"Together with an already effective vaccine, a cure for hepatitis B would truly make hepatitis B history."

About the Hepatitis B Foundation:

The Hepatitis B Foundation is the nation's leading nonprofit organization solely dedicated to finding a cure for hepatitis B and improving the quality of life for those affected worldwide

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through research, education and patient advocacy.

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