



DATE 22 March 2021

To: Representative John M. Mizuno, Chair
Representative Bertrand Kobayashi, Vice Chair
House Committee on Health and Human Service

Representative Sylvia Luke, Chair
Representative Ty J.K. Cullen, Vice Chair
House Committee on Finance

Re: Strong Support of HR 48 RECOGNIZING AND SUPPORTING ONGOING COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS TO IMPLEMENT A STATEWIDE STRATEGY TO ELIMINATE VIRAL HEPATITIS A, B, AND C IN HAWAI'I

Hrg: 23 March 2021, 9:00 am in conference room 329 Via Videoconference

The Hawai'i Public Health Association (HPHA) is a group of over 500 community members, public health professionals, and organizations statewide dedicated to improving public health. Our mission is to promote public health in Hawai'i through leadership, collaboration, education and advocacy. Issues around social justice and equity in areas that extend beyond the traditional context of health (e.g., education, digital equity, cultural sensitivity), can have profound impacts on health equity and well-being. Therefore, as stewards of public health, HPHA is advocating for equity in all policies.

HPHA strongly supports HR 48, to implement a statewide strategy to eliminate viral hepatitis A, B and C in Hawai'i. Viral hepatitis A, B and C have been long-term public health issues that result in serious morbidity and mortality among infected individuals. In 2013, viral hepatitis was the leading cause of death worldwide with a death toll that exceeded that from HIV, tuberculosis or malaria [1]. The majority of the burden is due to advanced liver disease from hepatitis B (HBV) and hepatitis C virus (HCV). HCV specifically is the top indication for liver transplant and a leading cause of liver cancer in the U.S. and HBV is the leading cause of liver cancer world-wide. The risk of transmission of hepatitis A (HAV), B and C varies among different populations. However, a commonality between each of these three infections is the disproportionate burden of infection among vulnerable populations such as the homeless, individuals impacted by substance abuse (specifically IV drug use as a main risk factor for HCV transmission), and foreign-born populations from HBV endemic countries. Acute HAV and HBV infection can be prevented with vaccination. Chronic HBV and progression of liver disease can be managed by proven treatments and routine screening for liver cancer. Acute HCV infection can be prevented by programs such as safe needle exchange. Chronic HCV infection can be cured by new treatments that offer a high success rate. Equally vital to prevention and management is screening for chronic HBV and HCV as a large percentage of individuals with HBV or HCV infection are unaware they are infected. Individuals with chronic HBV or HCV are often asymptomatic until they encounter symptoms of advanced liver disease.



Both the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), have called for the eliminate hepatitis B and C worldwide by 2030 and have published detailed and evidence-based strategies for prevention and management [1,2]. These strategies include vaccination efforts (applicable to HAV and HBV); harm reduction programs for persons who inject drugs (most applicable to HCV); and screening and treatment (applicable to HBV and HCV).

The elimination of viral hepatitis A, B, and C is a top public health priority both nationally and globally. It is imperative that action is taken and proven evidence-based strategies are deployed to eliminate viral hepatitis A, B and C in Hawai'i. HPHA strongly supports HR 48.

Respectfully submitted,

J. Leocadia Conlon, PhD, MPH, PA-C
Legislative Committee Co-Chair
Hawaii Public Health Association

References:

1. World Health Organization. *Combating Hepatitis B and C to reach elimination by 2030*. https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/206453/WHO_HIV_2016.04_eng.pdf;jsessionid=3D3313A564F45D1D27CDA4273DDA80FE?sequence=1
2. Center for Disease Control and Prevention. *Progress Toward Viral Hepatitis Elimination in the United States, 2017*. <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/policy/pdfs/nationalprogressreport.pdf>