



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**June 7, 2022**

## **Department of Health Highlights the Importance of Viral Hepatitis Awareness, Need for Expansion of Syringe Services**

**Harrisburg, PA** – The Pennsylvania Department of Health joined advocates and residents with lived experiences to highlight the importance of viral hepatitis awareness along with the success of syringe services programs.

“Viral hepatitis is significantly reduced by having access to syringe service programs,” Dr. Wendy Braund, DOH Deputy Secretary of Health Preparedness and Community Protection said during the awareness event news conference in the Capitol building. “The success of existing programs is evidence that residents across the state can help stop the spread of viral hepatitis if more syringe service programs are available.”

Nationwide, syringe services programs are associated with a significant reduction in injection-related Hepatitis C.

“According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, individuals who participate in syringe service programs are five times more likely to enter drug treatment,” Dr. Braund said, noting that DOH leaders were in Bethlehem and Pittsburgh last week to discuss syringe services with elected officials and members of the local heroin and opioid task forces who are eager to provide this service to residents in their region.”

To support those efforts, the Department of Health worked in partnership with the Pennsylvania Viral Hepatitis Eliminating Planning Committee and the Viral Hepatitis Interagency Workgroup to create the Pennsylvania [viral hepatitis elimination plan](#).

The plan is intended to achieve short-term and long-term goals, including:

- Creating and enhance prevention and education initiatives
- Expanding the availability of co-located viral hepatitis and harm reduction services and programs across the state
- Increasing testing and linkage to care and treatment
- Continuing surveillance of those diagnosed with Hepatitis B and C

“Forty-percent of Pennsylvanians living with Hepatitis C are unaware of their infection,” Dr. Stacey Trooskin, Chief Medical Officer of Philadelphia FIGHT said. “We can eliminate Hepatitis C from Pennsylvania but we must scale up testing, access to curative treatment and harm reduction services like syringe service programs as evidenced by the success we’ve seen in Philadelphia.”

The Wolf Administration worked closely with members of the General Assembly to develop Senate Bill 926 and House Bill 2264, which would allow organizations to engage in this work. Currently, there are more than 400 syringe service programs currently operating in 40 states,

the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

“There are vaccines available to prevent hepatitis A and B and medicines to treat hepatitis B and C,” said Dr. Chari Cohen, Senior Vice President, of the Hepatitis B Foundation. “Bringing this awareness to all regions of the state, combined with syringe service programs is critical as we work towards eliminating viral hepatitis in Pennsylvania.”

Currently, there are 166 organizations signed on to support syringe service programs, including several organizations joining the event today:

- The Allegheny Health Network
- Philadelphia Fight Community Health Centers
- Hepatitis B Foundation
- Clean Slate Recovery Centers
- Pennsylvania Harm Reduction Network
- Armstrong-Indiana-Clarion Drug and Alcohol Commission, INC
- Pennsylvania Association of County Drug and Alcohol Administrators
- Gaudenzia
- Pennsylvania Medical Society

“Without syringe service programs, there is a good chance that I would not be standing here speaking with you today,” said Kate Favata, Community Relations Liaison for Clean Slate Recovery Centers. “I am proof that not only do these programs work, but they help people lead impactful and full lives. “Some people who need these programs are currently not able to access them, and that needs to change.”

“One of the best tools that we can give people looking for recovery is the tool of connection with others,” said Dr. Braund. “By combining awareness, compassion and syringe services – we can get more people into recovery and away from a life of addiction and the complications that come with it.”

**MEDIA CONTACT:** Mark O’Neill, [ra-dhpressoffice@pa.gov](mailto:ra-dhpressoffice@pa.gov)

###