

Resolution on the Response to Viral Hepatitis in Ukraine

Approved Based on the Results of the Stakeholders Meeting

Kyiv, 19 July 2017

The meeting on viral hepatitis was held on 19 July 2017 with participation of representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), government agencies and international partners.

As estimated by the WHO, as of the end of 2015 there were over 325 million people with chronic hepatitis living in the world. Less than 9% of the total estimated number of people with hepatitis B and 20% of people with hepatitis C were tested and diagnosed. Less than one percent of those people received treatment.

According to the WHO data, Ukraine is one of 17 countries, which account for 70% of the total number of people with hepatitis in the world. The epidemiological situation with viral hepatitis in our country is becoming critical and calls for resolute actions.

Due to the inadequacy of hepatitis surveillance system and lack of screening tests to assess the level of hepatitis prevalence, there are no official data on viral hepatitis in Ukraine. The number of people with hepatitis C registered with healthcare institutions is 105 thousand.

As estimated by the WHO, in Ukraine over 5% (> 2 million people) are infected with hepatitis C, and hepatitis B infection level is estimated at 1 to 5%. Based on the results of rapid testing to detect antibodies to hepatitis C, conducted by Alliance for Public Health (hereinafter — Alliance) in 2011-2016, among 17,500 members of the general population tested in all regions of Ukraine, the average rate of positive results was 8-9%.

Analysis of the statistics presented in biobehavioral surveys of Alliance indicates high level of hepatitis prevalence in most vulnerable populations: prevalence among people who inject drugs is 55.9%, among sex workers — 11.2%, among men who have sex with men — 4.2%. Growth of the number of people officially registered with healthcare institutions may be associated both with generalization of the epidemic and with increased level of diagnostics.

Up to 2016, in Ukraine there was a National Targeted Social Program of Viral Hepatitis Prevention, Diagnostics and Treatment (hereinafter — the National Program). This National Program was implemented only in the part of activities related to the procurement of drugs in the amounts, which did not have an impact on the spread of epidemic and did not cover the existing needs, mainly due to significant under-financing (> 80%) of the program. Currently, there is no national program or strategy of response to hepatitis in the country.

As of the end of 2016, Ukraine had one of the lowest indicators in the countries of Europe and Central Asia in terms of infant coverage with hepatitis B immunization — 28.8%.

In the meantime, there has been certain progress in terms of raising public awareness on hepatitis, prevention in vulnerable populations, changing the paradigm of hepatitis C treatment, scope and range of hepatitis drugs procurement. In 2013-2016, 6,435 courses of hepatitis C treatment were delivered within the National Program, with no information available on treatment results/efficiency (according to the data provided by the Healthcare Departments of Regional State Administrations and Kyiv City State Administration).

Apart from the National Program, which was expired in 2016, since 2013 members of the key populations in Ukraine can receive hepatitis C treatment within the project implemented by Alliance together with 25 healthcare institutions subordinated to the Ministry of Health (MoH) of Ukraine in 19 regions of the country and the Public Health Center of the MoH of Ukraine. In

2016, over 1,200 people accessed treatment within the program implemented by Alliance, and as of 1 July 2017 — over 1,800 people.

Participants of the meeting discussed a wide range of questions on creating a favorable environment for the effective scale-up of viral hepatitis prevention, diagnostics, treatment, care and support activities through strengthened political commitments and coordinated efforts of governmental, non-governmental and international organizations, in particular research institutions, in the context of development of the effective response to hepatitis epidemic in Ukraine.

In the course of the meeting, the participants discussed new mechanisms and formats of cooperation, changes in legal and regulatory framework to enable productive and structured dialogue on the main challenges, which our country faces in order to improve the national response to hepatitis epidemic in Ukraine.

The participants of the meeting agreed on the need to ensure multilateral cooperation for approving and implementing the National Strategy and relevant Action Plan to Eliminate Viral Hepatitis, the implementation of which would allow Ukraine to eliminate viral hepatitis in several years, saving the lives of millions of Ukrainians.

The participants would like to draw the attention of the President, Supreme Council, and Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine to the need to demonstrate clear political will and leadership to ensure adequate national response to the epidemic of viral hepatitis.

Participants of the meeting agreed on a number of recommendations for stakeholders, which would contribute to the elimination of viral hepatitis:

1. Develop and approve the National Strategy to Eliminate Viral Hepatitis through the creation of a multidisciplinary technical working group, joining the stakeholders' representatives, in order to assess the current situation in response to the epidemic, define goals, objectives, implementing partners, responsibilities, budget, action plan as well as to coordinate the efforts of stakeholders.
2. Develop, approve, fully finance and assess the efficiency of the Action Plan to implement the National Strategy to Eliminate Viral Hepatitis.
3. Create and maintain an effective surveillance system for viral hepatitis, integrated with the existing and newly piloted systems (e.g. with eHealth and MIS "HIV Infection in Ukraine") with due protection of personal data in compliance with current legislation, and ensure technical support of such system.
4. Assess the level of viral hepatitis prevalence in Ukraine and assess the burden of the diseases.
5. Launch a national awareness-raising campaign on viral hepatitis prevention, routes of transmission, immunization (hepatitis B), diagnostics and treatment with involvement of government leaders and prominent personalities.
6. Strengthen the immunization activities at the national and regional levels.
7. Develop and approve the National Blood Donation and Transfusion Policy to improve the quality and optimize the system of blood donation, increase the safety level, in particular through the launch of external control over the quality of donated blood and its products.
8. Prevention and harm reduction activities among most vulnerable populations and people living with HIV are to be included in the Action Plan to implement the National Strategy to Eliminate Viral Hepatitis and financed by the government.
 - Support and scale up of harm reduction programs (needle and syringe exchange, other prevention interventions, expanded access to OST programs, etc.).
 - Regular anonymous testing of the members of risk groups for viral hepatitis.
 - Hepatitis B immunization for risk groups.

- Improved access to viral hepatitis diagnostics and treatment, in particular through mandatory inclusion of the members of vulnerable populations and people living with HIV into hepatitis treatment programs.

9. Gradually integrate hepatitis services into the primary health care system.

10. Regularly update the National Unified Clinical Protocol of Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Health Care for Adults and Children with Viral Hepatitis. Integrate clearly defined provisions on hepatitis testing, diagnostics and registration of patients in line with the WHO Guidelines into the National Protocol.

11. Prepare a separate section on health care for HIV/hepatitis and HIV/TB/hepatitis co-infections and integrate it in the above-mentioned National Unified Clinical Protocol of Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Health Care for Adults and Children with Viral Hepatitis.

12. Scale up access to highly effective drugs for hepatitis treatment, in particular reduce prices for drugs, register new highly effective drugs, increase funding from national and local budgets procure highly active direct-acting antivirals to treat hepatitis C, ensure timely procurement of drugs from national and local budgets, ensure uninterrupted treatment of separate categories of patients, and expand the range of drugs procured by including pan-genotypic drugs in order to ensure more efficient use of the budget funds. Facilitate the producers of generic versions of direct-acting antivirals in entering the Ukrainian market.

13. Ensure external audit and assessing the efficiency of using national and local budget funds to implement the activities stipulated in the Action Plan to implement the National Strategy to Eliminate Viral Hepatitis with the results of such audit made publicly available.

14. Develop regulations and requirements to the quality of generic drugs imported for personal use in order to scale up access to treatment with high-quality generic drugs.

15. Strengthen partnerships among non-governmental organizations, representatives of government agencies and key populations to improve cooperation for elimination of viral hepatitis at the national and regional levels. Ensure access of medical personnel to up-to-date data on viral hepatitis diagnostics and treatment and improve knowledge and qualification of service providers, in particular by signing memoranda of cooperation.

16. Introduce and finance medical and social support for people with hepatitis at the stage of diagnostics, treatment and control over the treatment efficacy within national, regional and municipal programs on viral hepatitis.