March 19, 2018

The Honorable Greg Walden, Chairman, House Energy & Commerce Committee
The Honorable Michael C. Burgess, Chairman, Health Subcommittee

RE: H.R. __, Eliminating Opioid-Related Infectious Diseases Act

The National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable (NVHR) is a broad coalition of 500 organizations working to end the hepatitis B and C epidemics in the United States. On behalf of the nearly 5 million people living with hepatitis B or C, we appreciate this opportunity to express support for H.R. __, the Eliminating Opioid-Related Infectious Diseases Act.

Skyrocketing rates of infection with hepatitis C and hepatitis B are among the devastating public health consequences of the opioid crisis in the United States. Hepatitis C is the deadliest infectious disease in America, killing nearly 20,000 people in 2014 alone, and injection drug use is the cause of most new infections. From 2010 to 2015, the number of new hepatitis C infections jumped by 294 percent, with particularly sharp increases among states hardest hit by the opioid crisis. Reported cases of hepatitis B, which can also be transmitted via injection drug use, increased 20.7 percent in 2015. Because of the direct link between injectable opioid use and hepatitis C and B, any initiative to tackle the opioid crisis in America must include a robust effort to screen, vaccinate, and treat people for these viruses.

The underfunding of surveillance and testing programs for hepatitis B and C has contributed in part to the explosion of these epidemics. By steering funding toward the prevention of infectious diseases spread by injection drug use, the Eliminating Opioid-Related Infectious Diseases Act of 2018 would take a step in the right direction. Even a modest increase in funding would ensure that more people are tested and linked to care for hepatitis B and C, preventing more infections and saving countless lives. NVHR strongly supports the Eliminating Opioid-Related Infectious Diseases Act because it would allocate badly needed resources to the fight against hepatitis B and C. We urge the Committee to begin addressing these epidemics with its approval of this legislation today.

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3 Id.
Respectfully submitted by,

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