

## Community News

## Liver Cancer Free Campaign: Mobilizing Public Support for Congressional Funding for Viral Hepatitis Research and Prevention Programs

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Few in the general public know that Hepatitis B virus (HBV) is a leading cause of cancer in humans, most notably liver cancer, the fifth leading type of cancer in the world. As many as 2 million Americans and 500 million people worldwide have viral hepatitis B, which accounts for 80% of all liver cancers worldwide. Most notably, Asian Americans have higher prevalence of viral hepatitis B than other racial and ethnic groups. Of the estimated 2 million chronic hepatitis B patient in the US, over half are Asian Americans. Among API men living in California, liver cancer ranks as a leading cause of cancer death: #1 for Laotian Americans, #2 for Vietnamese and Cambodian Americans, #4 for Chinese and Korean Americans and #5 for Filipino Americans.

Despite the enormous disease burden, there is currently a strong disproportionate underfunding of research and prevention for viral hepatitis and Liver cancer in the United States. Compared with 2009 CDC program funding for other infectious diseases, such as for HIV (\$692 million), other STDs (\$152 million), and TB (\$144 million) – hepatitis received only \$18 million, gravely underfunded relative to its high disease burden. Following the 2009 “Congressional Hepatitis Screening” and “Hepatitis Summit” in Washington DC, Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C advocates joined effort and enthusiastically worked to bring about policy change on

Capitol Hill to increase federal funding for viral hepatitis and liver cancer.

Through this process, the *Liver Cancer Free* campaign (<http://livercancerfree.org/>) was born. Formally endorsed by Nobel Laureate Baruch Blumberg MD PhD, discoverer of hepatitis B virus (HBV) and inventor of the HBV vaccine, and supported by the majority of viral hepatitis advocacy groups in the country, the *Liver Cancer Free* campaign aims to mobilize the public to petition Congress for increased funding for viral Hepatitis and liver cancer. Specifically, the campaign urges Congress to increase funding for viral hepatitis and liver cancer to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and National Institutes of Health (NIH) up to \$90 million in the final FY2011 Appropriations Bill. This will provide resources for the implementation of research, education, prevention, treatment and surveillance programs.

In this effort, *Liver Cancer Free* is notably collaborating with the 5.3-million-member *Campaign for Cancer Prevention* (<http://www.causes.com/cancer/>), a grassroots organization of public supporters for cancer prevention founded on Facebook by Harvard scientist Dr. Eric Ding, to jointly leverage support from the public and the scientific community for increased funding for hepatitis to prevent liver cancer.

Specifically, on behalf of hepatitis B patients and others silently suffering from chronic viral hepatitis, Liver Cancer Free and CCP are co-sponsoring a grassroots initiative for a joint petition campaign that urges Congress for increasing funding for viral hepatitis prevention, education and screening up to \$90 million in the final FY2011 Appropriations bill. “The Viral Hepatitis and Liver Cancer Prevention and Control Act of 2009” (H.R. 3974) was introduced in Congress on October 29, 2009 by U.S. Representatives Mike Honda, (D-CA) and Charles Dent (R-PA), with original cosponsors Bill Cassidy (R-LA), Adolph’s Towns (D-NY), Anh “Joseph” Cao (R-LA), David Wu (D-OR), Todd Platts (R-PA), Donna M. Christiansen (D-VI), Barbara Lee (D-CA), Bobby Rush (D-IL), George Butterfield (D-NC), and Judy Chu (D-CA). However, passage of the hepatitis and liver cancer legislation through appropriations

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committees will require substantial additional public support. The Liver Cancer Free and CCP campaign seeks to garner this support to speak out with one voice to provide the impetus for the successful passage of the Bill.

A recent Institute of Medicine (IOM) Report found that viral hepatitis is under-recognized as a serious public health problem, and as a result, funding for viral hepatitis programs had received inadequate funding. The Report concluded that the current approaches to the prevention and control of chronic hepatitis B and hepatitis C have been ineffective. As a remedy, the IOM recommended increased knowledge and awareness about chronic viral hepatitis among health care providers, social service providers, and the public; improved surveillance for hepatitis B and hepatitis C; and better integration of viral hepatitis services. In order to implement these recommendations, the Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention (CDC) and National Institutes of Health (NIH) must receive critical additional funding.

Therefore, the Liver Cancer Free campaign appeals to everyone to use the same site to speak out with one voice to their congressional representatives. "Together We Can" makes a difference in the prevention and treatment of liver cancer.

Support the Liver Cancer Free and Campaign for Cancer Prevention petitions. At:

<http://livercancerfree.org/>

and

<http://apps.facebook.com/causes/petitions/352>

**Together we can!**