

# Many European countries are not ready to stop viral hepatitis

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Many European countries lack a comprehensive policy to eliminate viral hepatitis as a major public health threat, according to a patient group-based survey implemented in 25 countries. The Hep-CORE study was coordinated by ISGlobal - an institution supported by the "la Caixa" Foundation - and led by the European Liver Patient's Association.

In 2016, viral [hepatitis](#) caused more deaths than HIV, malaria or tuberculosis. In the European Region, 18 and 15 million people live with chronic HBV and HCV infection, respectively. Due to widespread HBV vaccination, HBV infection is seen more in older Europeans or migrants from countries with high HBV prevalence. Regarding HCV - for which there is no vaccine - transmission is now mainly due to unsafe drug injection practices. New, highly effective direct-acting antiviral drugs have made HCV much easier and safer to cure, but they are costly and their availability remains a concern.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has called for the elimination of viral hepatitis as a major [public health threat](#) by 2030. But to reach this target, governments around the world must first consider whether they have the necessary policies and programmes in place.

A research team based at ISGlobal and the University of Copenhagen performed two rounds of surveys (in 2016 and 2017) with patient groups in 25 European countries, in order to assess policies and programmes that support elimination efforts.

Overall, the results indicate that many European countries have shortcomings across a wide range of elements, including national coordination, public awareness, disease surveillance, and treatment. In 2017, 72% of the countries were reported to have national HBV strategies and only half (52%) had national HCV strategies. Comparing 2016 and 2017, progress in government collaboration with civil society, disease registers, and access to direct-acting drugs for HCV was observed.

According to lead author Jeffrey Lazarus, who presented the study at the International Liver Congress 2018: "the patient-led Hep-CORE study offers a unique perspective on the readiness of these countries to undertake comprehensive viral hepatitis elimination efforts". The authors recommend that [viral hepatitis](#) monitoring should incorporate civil society perspectives, as has been done with global HIV monitoring.

**More information:** Jeffrey V Lazarus et al, Hep-CORE: a cross-sectional study of the viral hepatitis policy environment reported by patient groups in 25 European countries in 2016 and 2017, *Journal of the International AIDS Society* (2018). [DOI: 10.1002/jia2.25052](https://doi.org/10.1002/jia2.25052)

J.V. Lazarus et al. Restrictions on access to direct-acting antivirals for people who inject drugs: The European Hep-CORE study and the role of patient groups in monitoring national HCV responses, *International Journal of Drug Policy* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.drugpo.2017.05.054](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2017.05.054)

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