Letter to the editor

***Send this letter to the editor of your local daily or weekly paper.******Either use your own signature at the bottom or have the chair of your local group sign it. You may need to adapt it to make it relevant to your local situation.***

[*Letterhead*]

[*insert date*], 2021

Dear Editor:

July 28 is World Hepatitis Day. Even in the current COVID-19 crisis, a person dies every 30 seconds from a hepatitis related illness which is why this year’s theme is “*Hep Can’t Wait.*”

People living with viral hepatitis unaware *can’t wait* for testing. People living with hepatitis *can’t wait* for life saving treatments. Expectant mothers *can’t wait* for hepatitis screening and treatment. Newborn babies *can’t wait* for birth dose vaccination. People affected by hepatitis *can’t wait* to end stigma and discrimination. Community organizations *can’t wait* for greater investment. Decision makers *can’t wait* and must act now to make hepatitis elimination a reality through political will and funding.

Canada will join with groups around the world to raise public awareness of the life-threatening liver diseases hepatitis B and C. One in 12 people worldwide is infected with hepatitis B or C – 600,000 of them in Canada. Many don't even know it. They may have no obvious symptoms until serious liver damage has occurred. These are chronic, lifelong viral infections that can affect anyone from any walk of life.

Hepatitis is incorrectly stigmatized as an IV drug-users’ disease, a sexually transmitted disease and/or an alcoholic's disease, and few people realize that it takes only blood-to-blood transmission to pass it on -- something as simple as sharing personal hygiene items such as razors and toothbrushes, or by using non-sterile equipment for tattoos, body piercing, haircutting, injection drugs or medical procedures.

Hepatitis A and B may be prevented by vaccines but there is no vaccine for hepatitis C. The earlier hepatitis C is detected, the sooner it can be treated and the greater the likelihood of recovery. The most likely outcome without treatment is cirrhosis of the liver, which can be fatal in the absence of a liver transplant.

Hepatitis C is the most common chronic blood-borne virus in North America and the primary reason for liver transplants in Canada and the United States. Two thirds of patients on the transplant waiting list will die before a suitable liver becomes available. The disease is almost five times more prevalent than HIV in North America.

The focus of the World Hepatitis Day campaign is to raise public awareness. We urge everyone to learn about the risk factors involved in hepatitis B and C and the need for testing if they think they might have been infected. To find out more, visit www.hepatitiscanada.com

[*insert signature here – name, organization*]