

Hep Free NYC Advocacy Toolkit

**The New York City budget session is upon us!
Use this resource to support your advocacy activities.**

Section 1 - Background:

What is the Viral Hepatitis Initiative?

The New York City Council's Viral Hepatitis Initiative was established in 2014 in response to the high rates of hepatitis B virus (HBV) and hepatitis C virus (HCV) in NYC. The New York City Council's Viral Hepatitis Initiative funds 32 organizations to provide hepatitis B and C prevention and access to care services for at-risk NYers, as well as training and technical assistance for clinical and social service providers. The Initiative currently fully funds employment for more than 51 people: syringe exchange program peers, patient navigators, and training and technical assistance providers from the communities they serve.

The Viral Hepatitis Initiative serves people at highest risk for hepatitis B and C, HIV, overdose, and coronavirus, including the uninsured, immigrants, and people who have a history of, or who are used drugs. The Initiative has served over 15,000 people at risk for hepatitis B or C in navigation programs and linked over 6,500 medically vulnerable NYers to care. The initiative has trained and employed more than 64 patient navigators and 117 Peers from syringe exchange programs and has trained over 2,000 clinical providers in hepatitis B and C testing and treatment. During the past year, the programs have built telehealth capacity and moved to virtual programming to continue critical training, prevention, and access to care services to address the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Viral Hepatitis Initiative funding is critical to the communities at risk for hepatitis B and C in NYC, who have also been hit hardest by the global coronavirus pandemic. Continuing to support the Viral Hepatitis Initiative will enable the funded organizations to provide integrated hepatitis B and C prevention and care services to prevent liver disease, liver cancer and ongoing transmission of disease.

Section 2 - Next Steps

Tips, tricks, and scripts for contacting City Council Members

Why call and email City Council members?

1. To raise awareness (particularly among the Health Committee members) about the importance of funding and supporting the Viral Hepatitis Initiative.
2. To strengthen support and organize efforts among viral hepatitis partners to sustain and increase City Council funds.

Things to remember when contacting City Council members by phone or email:

1. Identify yourself clearly, providing name, number, and email. Be sure to tell the person answering the phone that you are a **Constituent**. A constituent's call should get priority over the many other calls an office gets in a day.
2. Contact the correct person. Calls are taken by any staff member, not necessarily those who work on the issues you care about. Ask to speak with the person handling health issues.
3. Leave a brief message stating what you want. **You want continued (or expanded) funding for the Viral Hepatitis Initiative.**
4. Thank your council members/representative for their support and their time.

Making Phone Calls to City Council Member Offices:

Step 1: Identify Who to Call

Find the City Council member(s) who represents the area in NYC where you live or where you work. Call as many people as you can even if you are not in their district. Contact your representatives and contact the people designated to work on the Health Committee. If you know that a member has been supportive of the Viral Hepatitis Initiative in the past – thank them and ask them to continue their support.

Find Council Member contact information [HERE](#)

Step 2: Leave a Message

“Hello, my name is _____ from _____. I am a **CONSTITUENT** and I am calling to ask [insert council member] for continued support and funding of the NYC Council's Viral Hepatitis Initiative which supports community programs that address viral hepatitis in NYC. I want to thank [insert council member] for their support of the NYC Council's Viral Hepatitis Initiative. I would like to schedule a meeting to talk to you about the valuable services we are providing to people with hepatitis. Please let me know when we can meet to discuss this further. I can be reached at: _____.

Step 3: Have a Conversation

“Hello, My name is _____ from [list your organization affiliation]” --OR-- if you're a constituent you can say, “I'm a constituent [brief description of affiliation] and I am calling to ask [name of Council Member] for their support of the NYC Council's Viral Hepatitis Initiative by increasing the City Council's Schedule C funding to programs that address Viral Hepatitis in NYC. This critical public health funding empowers frontline community organizations to meet the health needs of many, vulnerable New Yorkers affected by viral hepatitis. The COVID-19 pandemic has made our work in viral hepatitis prevention, screening, care, and treatment even more difficult.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic led to a significant decrease in health care visits resulting in a lower number of new diagnoses of hepatitis B and C in 2020. As a result, the number of newly reported cases of chronic hepatitis B and C in NYC was at its lowest during the last 10 years.

Despite the decline, more than 300,000 people in NYC are estimated to be living with chronic hepatitis B and/or C. Over a third are still unaware of their infection. Gaps in Viral Hepatitis care and treatment remain. Hepatitis B and C disproportionately affect people with barriers to health care, including people who: are foreign-born, have low income, are men who have sex with men, use drugs, have a history of homelessness or criminal justice involvement. [per the NYC DOHMH, New York City Health Department Hepatitis A, B and C in NYC, 2022 Annual Report]

Thanks to the dedicated support of New York City Council, the Viral Hepatitis Initiative is well-positioned to make substantial progress towards Viral Hepatitis Elimination locally. We hope we can rely on your continued support of the Viral Hepatitis Initiative. We thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to collaborating with you towards viral hepatitis elimination in New York City.”

Step 4: Send an Email

Dear [Name of Council Member],

Hello, My name is _____ from [list your organization affiliation] --OR-- if you're a constituent you can say, "I'm a constituent [brief description of affiliation] and I am advocating for your support of the NYC Council's Viral Hepatitis Initiative by increasing the City Council's Schedule C funding to programs that address Viral Hepatitis in NYC.

This critical public health funding empowers frontline community organizations to meet the health needs of many, vulnerable New Yorkers affected by viral hepatitis. The COVID-19 pandemic has made our work in viral hepatitis prevention, screening, care, and treatment even more difficult.

Thanks to the dedicated support of New York City Council, the Viral Hepatitis Initiative is well-positioned to make substantial progress towards Viral Hepatitis Elimination locally. We hope we can rely on your continued support of the Viral Hepatitis Initiative.

We would like to schedule a time to meet with you to provide you with more detail about this issue and the work that we do. Please let us know when a good date and time would be to meet.

We thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to collaborating with you towards viral hepatitis elimination in New York City.

Sincerely,

[Your name]

[Name of your organization]

-OR-

Dear [Name of Council Member],

We would like to set up a meeting with [council member/Health Committee Member] or a staff member to discuss the City Council Viral Hepatitis Initiative plans for viral hepatitis elimination and to find more opportunities to collaborate. Let us know a date and time that works best for your schedule.

Note: You can learn more about [your organization and website/social media handles] here.

Sincerely

[Your name]

[Name of your organization]

Additional Scripts

Scenario 1

Secretary to Council Member: Good afternoon, [Office of Health Committee Chair Council member Lynn Schulman].

Community Organizer: Hello, My name is {Insert your name} and I am a constituent of [Councilmember Schulman]. I was wondering if I can schedule a meeting with [Councilmember Schulman] to discuss her continued interest in supporting the Viral Hepatitis Initiative?

Secretary: Yes, we are definitely interested in discussing this initiative. Can you give me more details about the Viral Hepatitis Initiative?

Organizer: The Viral Hepatitis Initiative has accomplished a lot even during the COVID pandemic. We are grateful for Councilmember Schulman role on the Health Committee and her continued support of the NYC Council's Viral Hepatitis Initiative. We want to ask to increase the NYC Council's Schedule C discretionary fund to programs that address Viral Hepatitis in NYC. This critical public health funding empowers frontline community organizations to meet the health needs of many New Yorkers affected by viral hepatitis. The Covid-19 pandemic kept many people from with hepatitis b and c from seeking care and deeply hindered screening, prevention and education efforts. This Covid-19 public health emergency demonstrated that our work in viral hepatitis prevention, screening, care and treatment and supporting communities at risk is even more critical. Thanks to the dedicated support of New York City Council, the Viral Hepatitis Initiative has supported organizations in New York City offering screening, care, education, prevention and treatment of viral hepatitis. However, it is critical that we have your continued support of the Viral Hepatitis Initiative if we want achieve elimination of Viral Hepatitis in New York City by 2030.

Secretary: Thank you. I think Councilmember Lynn Schulman would be interested to discuss this with you and your group. We could schedule an in-person meetings at this time, or perhaps I can give you the contact to the scheduler of Councilmember Lynn Schulman to set up a date and time to meet.

Organizer: Yes that would be great. What is the name and contact information?

Secretary: John Doe, at J.doe@council.nyc.gov

Organizer: Thank you so much. I'll send an email. Looking forward to collaborating together.

Scenario 2

Secretary: Good Morning, **Councilmember** Erik Bottcher office.

Organizer: Hello, My name is {Insert Name} and I work for {name your organization(s)}. We are one of the organizations supported by the Viral Hepatitis Initiative and we would like to set up a meeting with Councilmember Bottcher or a staff member to discuss the NYC Council Viral Hepatitis Initiative plans for viral hepatitis elimination and find more opportunities to collaborate with local officials.

Secretary: Hi. We can set that up. Please email **CouncilMember Bottcher's scheduler**. I'll provide you the name and contact information.

Organizer: Great! Thank you for your help.

Section 3: Other Resources and Important Dates

Important Links:

2022 Hepatitis A, B and C Annual Report - [HERE](#)

NYC Viral Hepatitis Elimination Plan - [HERE](#)

Find Council Member - [HERE](#)

FY25 Discretionary Application - [HERE](#)

Viral Hepatitis Initiative Advocacy Timeline:

- January 5, 2024 City Council Funding Application Released
- January 10, 2024 @ 3:30– Advocacy Training – Intro to City Funding
- Weekly Advocacy Drop-in Sessions (via zoom) for help with completing application or making calls/writing e-mails to city council members
 - January 25, 2024 @ 3:30PM <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87956993041>
 - February 5, 2024 @ 12PM <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82665142926>
 - February 15, 2024 @1pm <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86030290253>
- February 20, 2024 – City Council Applications Due
- March 5, 2024 @ 10AM – VHI Educational Briefing

- March 21, 2024 @ 1:30PM – Preliminary Budget Hearing on Health
 - [Link for more details](#)

Viral Hepatitis Advocacy Leadership Team:

Check Hep C:

Kenia Liriano, Community Health Action of Staten Island - kenia.liriano@chasiny.org

Check Hep B:

Emily Li, Korean Community Services - emily@kcsny.org

Hep C Peer:

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Training & Education:

Joy Cambe, Empire Liver Foundation - joycambe@empireliverfoundation.org;

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