

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2009 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Revised

House Bill 76 (Delegate Nathan-Pulliam, *et al.*)
Health and Government Operations Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Hepatitis C Virus - Public Awareness and Outreach - Sunset Extension

This bill extends the termination date for a requirement that the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) conduct outreach and public awareness campaigns regarding the hepatitis C virus (HCV) and report annually on its activities from December 31, 2009, to June 30, 2013.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2009.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill has no direct effect on State finances since the program does not receive any State funds. Nevertheless, DHMH will continue related outreach and annual reporting using existing staff and resources.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: Chapter 149 of 2003 established the State Advisory Council on Hepatitis C, which terminated September 30, 2005, to review and recommend changes to the Maryland Hepatitis C Prevention and Control Plan and solicit funds or grants to implement the plan. DHMH was required to staff the advisory council.

Chapter 457 of 2006 required DHMH, as funds are available, to take the following actions regarding HCV education and treatment:

- conduct a needs assessment to determine the incidence of HCV in Maryland;
- initiate a statewide HCV public awareness campaign;
- coordinate with other units of State government to activate a HCV plan to educate, test, and treat populations within the units' jurisdiction;
- solicit funding from the private sector and federal, State, and local government for HCV outreach;
- fund HCV pilot programs;
- review and recommend initiatives to promote advocacy, education, physician outreach, and awareness of HCV;
- assess the feasibility of creating a HCV Administration within DHMH and examine ways to maximize existing resources to raise awareness of HCV; and
- implement the 2005 report of the HCV Advisory Council.

DHMH reports annually to the Governor and specified legislative committees on its HCV activities.

Background: HCV is an inflammation of the liver caused by a virus and is the most common chronic blood borne viral infection in both the United States and Maryland. Most new HCV infections have been linked to sharing needles among injection drug users; other sources include sexual exposure and blood transfusions.

At least 95,400 people in Maryland are currently infected with HCV, and national estimates indicate that 1.8% of the population is infected nationwide. Most people infected have no symptoms and are unaware of their infection.

DHMH submitted its most recent report required by Chapter 457 in May 2008. Outlined in the report is the department's progress on the campaign and in implementing the Hepatitis C Advisory Council's 2005 report recommendations. DHMH's activities include the distribution of educational materials, hepatitis A and C vaccines, and public service announcements. DHMH also provides staff support to three local HCV programs in Frederick County, Prince George's County, and Baltimore City. DHMH notes that a lack of funding has hindered the implementation of certain council recommendations.

To date, DHMH has not received State funding to implement the HCV program. However, through a federal grant, it employs one full-time staff person to coordinate HCV outreach and prevention activities in the State as part of its community health program.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Department of Legislative Services

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