



GEORGIA

1. Plan Development

Since July 2022, Georgia has created and published a viral hepatitis elimination plan that includes strategies to address HAV, HBV, and HCV. Although the plan's progress will be monitored by the Georgia Department of Public Health Viral Hepatitis Program and reported during ongoing workgroup and sub-committee meetings, the plan does not include a commitment to publish at least annual progress reports or any indication that people with lived / living experience were included in the plan's development process.

2. Harm Reduction Laws

Syringe Services Program Legality, Syringe Exchange Specifications, Medical Emergency Laws, and "Works" Possession Laws and Syringe Exemption

Although Georgia has passed a law authorizing SSPs, possessing a syringe even from an SSP is still illegal. The only related syringe possession exemption in effect is GA Code § 16-13-32(c)(2), which provides a protection for the possession of syringes for people who work for SSPs. There is no express protection for participants in syringe services programs. This means that even if someone engages in the services of an SSP and acquires a syringe, they can still be found in violation of the law for possessing said syringe(s).

3. Budget Allocation

Specific Funds Allocated for Plan Implementation, State Budget, and State Corrections Budget

Although there was a state budget allocation for infectious disease control in the GA FY23-24 budget, there was no specific state budget allocation identified related to viral hepatitis. While public health programs may be funded through various budget allocations, a designated line item for hepatitis establishes a commitment to providing resources to support ongoing efforts to improve statewide viral hepatitis outcomes. The state should consider creating this specific line-item allocation in its overall budget and in its corrections budget.

4. Improving Viral Hepatitis Prevention, Treatment, and Outcomes

Educational and Perinatal Information for the Public, Provider Training, and Medicaid Expansion

Georgia does provide educational information and materials geared towards the public, as well as perinatal information for HBV and HCV, all of which are linguistically diverse. It provides limited resources to increase provider capacity to treat more people with viral hepatitis though. The state should link providers to a more comprehensive training resource, such as Project ECHO, Hepatitis B Online, and Hepatitis C Online. Georgia is also a state that has not expanded Medicaid.

Standard of Care for HCV in State Corrections, Targeted Interventions for Key Populations, and Enduring Coalition

The creation of the state's viral hepatitis elimination plan has led to several key developments across the state. It led to the establishment of the Georgia Viral Hepatitis Elimination Workgroup, which is comprised of health department staff, community-based organizations, and even individuals whose work primarily focuses on HIV and substance use. The plan mentions the state's intent to integrate viral hepatitis testing and treatment in corrections but does not clearly state that HCV testing and treatment would be made widely available in correctional settings. The plan also outlines efforts to establish and maintain targeted interventions for key populations, such as those experiencing homelessness and those who inject drugs. However, we are not aware of these strategies / guidances being in accordance with the AASLD/IDSA treatment guidelines.

Hepatitis C: State of Medicaid Access Grade

There has been no change in Georgia's Hepatitis C: State of Medicaid Access grade: it remains a C due to the stringent requirements being imposed that hinder access to HCV treatment for many.

5. Improving Viral Hepatitis Surveillance and Data Usage

Epidemiological Report / Profile, and Public-Facing Website with Viral Hepatitis Data

The state should consistently publish a comprehensive viral hepatitis epidemiological report and publish regularly updated epidemiological data on the state's website for HAV, HBV, and HCV. Hopefully, with the creation of Georgia's new viral hepatitis elimination plan, new reports and a data dashboard will be created and released soon.