



PUERTO RICO

1. Plan Development

Puerto Rico has not created a comprehensive viral hepatitis elimination plan yet. The Department of Health, through its STD/HIV/HV Prevention Division, however, commissioned a study of the gap in Viral Hepatitis (HV) surveillance and prevention services in Puerto Rico. Its objective is to guide the efforts for the creation of a Multisectoral Advisory Committee for the Elimination of HV (VHEAC). The information derived from the evaluation, together with the recommendations of the Committee, will provide the basis for a Plan for the Elimination of Viral Hepatitis in Puerto Rico 2023-2027. A copy of the draft plan is publicly available, and the jurisdiction is accepting comments and feedback on the draft. The jurisdiction is expected to publish a plan by 2025 in accordance with CDC PS21-2103.

2. Harm Reduction Laws

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

SSPs are authorized by law in the jurisdiction. There are at least two in operation: El Punto en la Montaña and Intercambios Puerto Rico. Additional harm reduction policies, including functioning on a needs-based policy and offering an exemption for violating possession laws for possessing syringes acquired from an SSP, will aid state efforts to engage with key populations at greatest risk for viral hepatitis transmission. There are also no Good Samaritan Laws in place to protect individuals who call 911 to request emergency medical assistance for others or for themselves.

3. Budget Allocation

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

Viral hepatitis is mentioned in the FY23 budget, but it is not mentioned in Puerto Rico’s corrections budget. A designated line item for hepatitis would signal a commitment to providing resources to support ongoing efforts to improve statewide viral hepatitis outcomes.

4. Improving Viral Hepatitis Prevention, Treatment, and Outcomes

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

Puerto Rico is a Medicaid expansion jurisdiction; since July 2022, it has begun providing educational information pertaining to viral hepatitis and perinatal HCV information to the public. It does not provide perinatal HBV information though. Puerto Rico has partnered with the Empire Liver Foundation to provide training to primary care providers; however, this information is not available on the ASES website.

Standard of Care for HCV in State Corrections

A publicly available, separate, state-drafted guidance for the standard of care for HCV in state corrections that includes strategies to offer DAA treatment for HCV to all persons with a confirmed HCV diagnosis held in state corrections in accordance with the AASLD/IDSA treatment guidelines does not exist in Puerto Rico, and there has been no litigation regarding the matter. However, in the plan that is currently under development, a stated objective to improve the quality of care for individuals who receive continued care for hepatitis B and C, and complete treatment is “to increase the number of people who receive treatment who have viral hepatitis, including people in correctional settings.”

Targeted Interventions for Key Populations and the Provision of Linguistically Diverse Informational Materials

There are state-sponsored targeted interventions being offered to key populations.

Enduring Coalition / Task Force to Coordinate and Leverage Resources

Hopefully with the creation of Puerto Rico’s new elimination plan, the Multisectoral Advisory Committee for the Elimination of HV (VHEAC) will continue to persist and assist with leveraging resources across agencies.

Hepatitis C: State of Medicaid Access Grade

Puerto Rico’s Hepatitis C: State of Medicaid Access grade has improved from a C to a B following the removal of its prescriber certification requirement. Puerto Rico can further improve access by removing prior authorization altogether.

5. Improving Viral Hepatitis Surveillance and Data Usage

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

There is no viral hepatitis epidemiological report or incidence data available on the jurisdiction’s ASES site. We are not aware as to whether the data included in the draft elimination plan is already publicly available elsewhere. To improve transparency, the jurisdiction should make sure to publish the epidemiological data for HAV, HBV, and HCV that is already included in the draft of the Viral Hepatitis Elimination Plan being finalized.