



For Immediate Release: July 18, 2017

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The Long Island Association for AIDS Care Observes National African American Hepatitis C Action Day.

July 25, 2017 marks the Fifth Annual National African American Hepatitis C Action Day (NAAHCAD), lead by the National Black Leadership Commission on AIDS, Inc. (NBLCA) and the Coalition on Positive Health Empowerment (COPE). It is a day dedicated to promoting Hepatitis C prevention, testing, treatment, and Linkage to Care in our African American communities, and other at-risk people that are disproportionately affected by the virus.

According to the New York State Department of Health's (NYSDOH) latest publication on the reported cases of communicable diseases, there were 1,400 reported cases of people living with Hepatitis C in Nassau and Suffolk County in 2015. And with the current opioid epidemic, and the increasing use of injection drugs, the numbers may rise further. In July 2017, the NYSDOH reported that over 5,300 Long Islanders have been admitted to an OASAS-certified chemical dependence treatment program, with the majority of clients living in Suffolk County.

Hepatitis C has been called the Silent Epidemic because many people who are infected with the Hepatitis C virus (HCV) do not show apparent symptoms for decades. It is most recognized in the chronic stages when liver damage has occurred.

HCV infections could range in severity from a mild illness lasting a few weeks (acute infection), or a lifelong illness (chronic infection) that attacks the liver, resulting in liver problems, including cirrhosis or liver cancer. The virus is spread when infected blood enters the body of someone who is not infected.

There are several ways one could become infected, but sharing injection drug needles; being born to an infected mother; and blood transfusions and organ transplants before 1992 are the most common ways it is transmitted.

LIAAC will be participating in NAAHCAD by spreading Hepatitis C awareness and encouraging testing on our social media outlets. LIAAC provides free and confidential Hepatitis C testing as well as education and Linkage to Care services. For more information, or to schedule a Hepatitis C test, call our hotline at 1-877-865-4222.

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