Harm Reduction Coalition Awards $5.3 Million to Local Organizations Expanding Harm Reduction in Indiana, Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee and West Virginia as part of the HepConnect Initiative

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For Immediate Release

New York City, NY -- Harm Reduction Coalition is proud to award more than $5.3 million in grant funding to 44 projects from 32 organizations with generous support from Gilead Sciences under the HepConnect Initiative. HepConnect is a regional initiative to mobilize and expand capacity for organizations working with people who use drugs in five states significantly impacted by rising hepatitis C (HCV) rates: Indiana, Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee and West Virginia.

Grants were awarded in two categories: Provide and Educate. Grantees will use funds to provide new or expanded harm reduction services for people who use drugs (e.g. supplies, outreach sites and mobile vans, and testing materials) or to educate the community about harm reduction (e.g. public education, advocacy campaigns). Funding also supports staffing and creating positions, training, and support groups for people who use drugs.

With more than 120 applications reviewed, the 44 projects awarded the 18-month funding allocation were selected by a committee of regional and national harm reduction experts, including people with lived experience. Awards focused on projects that would have the most impact with people who inject drugs and selected grantees were required to articulate both the need and how they would include impacted communities in their projects.

Beyond funding support, the HepConnect Initiative will also include a regional team of four full-time staff, including the new Regional Director Dr. Orisha Bowers, who is located in Memphis, Tennessee. Three regional resource coordinators will be hired to support grantees and other groups and organizations with technical assistance, community mobilization, and site visits.
Grantees represent local syringe access and harm reduction programs, public health departments, and other organizations working in their respective regions to expand access to harm reduction and support services for people who use drugs:

**Indiana Grantees ($934K)**
- *Provide:* Aliveness Project, Aspire Indiana Health, Imani and Unidad, Indiana Recovery Alliance, The Never Alone Project
- *Educate:* Indiana Recovery Alliance, The Never Alone Project

**Kentucky Grantees ($1.05 million)**
- *Provide:* Appalachian Regional Healthcare, AVOL Kentucky, Kentucky Harm Reduction Coalition, Madison County Health Department, Muhlenberg County Health Department, Whitley County Health Department
- *Educate:* Kentucky Harm Reduction Coalition, Madison County Health Department, Norton Healthcare, University of Louisville Research Foundation

**North Carolina Grantees ($1.36 million)**
- *Provide:* Center for Prevention Services, Hyde County Health Department, North Carolina Harm Reduction, North Carolina Survivors Union, Steady Collective, The Olive Branch Ministries, Twin City Harm Reduction Collective

**Tennessee Grantees ($1.09 million)**
- *Provide:* Choice Health Network / Positively Living, Next Step Initiative, Street Works, Tennessee Recovery Alliance
- *Educate:* Next Step Initiative, Partnership to End AIDS Status (PEAS), Tennessee Recovery Alliance, WeCareTN

**West Virginia Grantees ($929K)**
- *Provide:* Cabell-Huntington Health Department, Opioid Response Innovation Initiative, Milan Puskar Health Right, Virginia Harm Reduction Coalition
- *Educate:* Cabin Creek Health Systems, Virginia Harm Reduction Coalition, The Community Education Group

Funding and ground support for organizations in the region arrives after a six month process of meaningful community involvement, including five state launch events attended by more than 400 people and community listening and consultation calls with more than 140 individuals who identified organizational, local and state-level dynamics, barriers, and opportunities to expand harm reduction services. Community stakeholders consulted in the process included people who use drugs, harm reduction organizations, health departments and other community leaders in the region. Key barriers identified with community stakeholders included limited access to syringe service programs, barriers to medication assisted treatment and restrictions for hepatitis
C treatment affecting service provision in the region. To read more about the specific projects and grantees, you can visit hepconnect.com/grantees.

“Communities in regions like Appalachia, the Midwest and the South are experiencing unprecedented outbreaks of HIV, hepatitis C, and overdoses from opioids. Without financial resources and legislative backing from state and federal governments, many of the hardest hit communities in these regions are unable to adapt comprehensive programs in a harm reduction framework. This is why the HepConnect program and the investment from Gilead Sciences is so critical right now. HepConnect offers not only a commitment, but a deep investment in strengthening the harm reduction infrastructure in these regions.”

— Monique Tula, Executive Director at Harm Reduction Coalition

“HepConnect’s first grants will provide new financial support for organizations fighting our nation’s rising HCV infection rates to be even more effective. These grants represent the spirit of what we set out to achieve: identify local organizations with proven success working to prevent new HCV infections and implement evidence-based harm reduction strategies that save lives. Today begins the next phase of the HepConnect initiative’s work to scale up efforts across greater Appalachia hardest hit by HCV. We believe strongly that the people at the center of the challenge should also be at the center of the solution, and that is why we must support community-based organizations that are best suited to address this public health challenge.”

— Arun Skaria, Director, Public Affairs at Gilead Sciences

About Harm Reduction Coalition
Harm Reduction Coalition is a national advocacy and capacity-building organization that promotes health and justice for people and communities affected by drug use. Learn more at http://harmreduction.org.

About HepConnect
HepConnect is a five-year, multi-million dollar initiative to help address the increase in HCV infections in greater Appalachia, focused on expanding HCV screening, linking people to care, improving healthcare professional education and supporting evidence-based harm reduction services through partnerships. To learn more, visit www.hepconnect.com.