

A Bill for an Act Relating to Viral Hepatitis.

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Hawaii:

SECTION 1. The legislature finds that the department of health reports that hepatitis B and C viral infections are associated with earlier deaths and higher death rates in Hawaii. From 2000 to 2020, yearly mortality rates associated with hepatitis B were higher in Hawaii compared to the entire United States, with death rates three times higher in 2019 alone. These death rates were notably higher among Asian and Pacific Islander residents compared to the rest of the State. Furthermore, from 2018 to 2021, eighty-eight per cent of Hawaii residents with hepatitis C died before reaching average life expectancy for the rest of the State. These deaths continue to occur in Hawaii despite the availability of effective tools to prevent, treat, and even cure these infections. To address the burden of viral hepatitis in Hawaii, the department of health has successfully leveraged community and state partnerships to convene the “Hep Free 2030: The Hawai‘i Hepatitis Elimination Strategy 2020-2030.” The coalition has made progress towards eliminating viral hepatitis by focusing on five priority areas: awareness and education; access to services; advocacy at all levels; equity in everything; and data for decision-making. In 2021, the legislature adopted House Concurrent Resolution No. 59, H.D. 1, which found that continued coordination and ongoing efforts are needed to further implement the statewide strategy to eliminate viral hepatitis types A, B, and C in Hawaii. However, there has been no state funding dedicated to the prevention, management, and treatment of viral hepatitis infections.

Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to expand the State’s capacity to address preventable morbidity and mortality from viral hepatitis among Hawaii residents through established and innovative public health interventions.

SECTION 2. Chapter 325, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is amended by adding four new sections to part V to be appropriately designated and to read as follows:

“§325- Definitions. As used in this part, “department” means the department of health.

§325- Hepatitis prevention program. (a) The department may establish and administer a hepatitis prevention program to prevent morbidity and mortality among Hawaii residents due to hepatitis B and hepatitis C.

- (b) The hepatitis prevention program shall prioritize:
 - (1) Hepatitis awareness and education;
 - (2) Increasing access to services;
 - (3) Assuring health equity and addressing the social determinants of health as they relate to hepatitis; and
 - (4) The collection, analysis, and reporting of relevant data to support hepatitis prevention and treatment.

§325- Awareness and education. The department shall develop and implement throughout the State an educational program for the purpose of informing the community how to identify and prevent hepatitis and aid in its early diagnosis. In furtherance of the hepatitis prevention program, the department may assist and cooperate with any or all territorial, state, and national organizations conducting educational programs for the prevention and control of hepatitis.

§325- Prevention plan; screening; treatment support. The department shall develop a statewide, comprehensive hepatitis prevention plan. The plan shall include hepatitis screening and services to support individuals with hepatitis to access care and treatment. The department may work with other government agencies, health care providers, health insurers, and community stakeholders to improve overall rates of screening, diagnosis, and treatment of hepatitis.”

SECTION 3. Section 325-92, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is amended to read as follows:

“~~§§325-92~~ Prenatal hepatitis B screening and treatment of newborns. The department [of health] may adopt rules necessary to provide appropriate hepatitis B screening of pregnant women, including reporting and follow-up procedures for newborns of hepatitis B carrier mothers. ~~[The department may provide medications necessary for the treatment of newborns of indigent and medically indigent carrier mothers.]~~”

SECTION 4. Section 325-91, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is repealed.

SECTION 5. There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$545,000 or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2025-2026 and the same sum or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 for the establishment and implementation of the hepatitis prevention program, including the establishment of the following positions within the department of health:

- (1) One full-time equivalent (1.0 FTE) program specialist V position;
- (2) One full-time equivalent (1.0 FTE) epidemiological specialist position; and
- (3) One full-time equivalent (1.0 FTE) office assistant III position.

The sums appropriated shall be expended by the department of health for the purposes of this Act.

SECTION 6. Statutory material to be repealed is bracketed and stricken. New statutory material is underscored.¹

SECTION 7. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2025.

(Approved May 29, 2025.)

Note

1. Edited pursuant to HRS §23G-16.5.