



For Immediate Release

**Community Education Group Issues New Report Warning of Addiction/
Hepatitis/HIV “Syndemic” in West Virginia**

LOST RIVER, W.Va. (May 3, 2021) – A new report issued by the Community Education Group (CEG) details what the organization calls a “syndemic” of Substance Use Disorder, Viral Hepatitis, and HIV that constitutes a grave and ongoing threat to public health in West Virginia.

The report, entitled *Deconstructing Silos in West Virginia: Breaking Down Barriers Between HIV, Substance Use Disorder, and Viral Hepatitis Care*, describes how misguided policies and gaps in infrastructure are leaving multiple West Virginia counties vulnerable to outbreaks of Hepatitis and HIV, largely driven by the state’s opioid addiction crisis. West Virginia leads the nation in Viral Hepatitis diagnoses, and new HIV diagnoses have been increasing since 2017. The document lays out steps for reversing these trends, such as improving access to testing and treatment, and making sure infected and at-risk patients are referred to the appropriate care and services.

A. Toni Young, CEG’s executive director, emphasized the importance of addressing the linked HIV, Hepatitis, and Substance Use crises together, in a coordinated way.

“Treating these problems as separate epidemics has only inhibited accurate data collection and made effective prevention efforts more difficult,” said Young. “These are linked crises, and here in West Virginia they are turning into a kind of perfect storm that our health infrastructure is currently just not equipped to deal with.”

The new report from CEG, a nonprofit with decades of experience strategizing public health interventions in vulnerable communities, calls for improving public access to testing, treatment, and health information. Other recommendations include beefing up public health staff and infrastructure, and expanding availability of Opioid Treatment and Harm Reduction programs—interventions that have been shown to help decrease HIV and Hepatitis infection rates, but which have been hampered by political opposition that ignores their effectiveness.

The full *Deconstructing Silos* report can be accessed here: <https://cutt.ly/CEG-Deconstructing-Silos-Report>

The Community Education Group (CEG) is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization working to ignite community engagement, eliminate disparities in health outcomes, and improve public health in vulnerable populations and underserved communities. CEG accomplishes this by conducting research, training community health workers to educate and test people who are hard to reach or at risk, sharing expertise through national networks and local capacity building efforts, and advocating for practical and effective health policies that lead to social change.

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