

White House Under Pressure To Promote Better Access For Hepatitis C Drugs

By [Jill Arce](#), Tech Times | August 26, 2015

Hepatitis C causes the death of 20,000 people each year in the United States. This silent epidemic, as federal officials call it, kills more people in a year than AIDS does.

Gilead Sciences has introduced the wonder drugs Harvoni and Sovaldi as a cure to Hepatitis C. The recommended 12-week treatment using Harvoni costs \$94,500 and \$84,000 for Sovaldi. That's about \$1,000 a pill.

And that's just about what the public knows about these Hepatitis C drugs.

A wider access to information regarding these new Hepatitis C treatments are continuously being sought, putting the White House under pressure to promote better access.

Healthcare experts told the White House that there is a great need for federal and state Medicaid officials to widen access to prescription drugs known to treat Hepatitis C, including Gilead's thousand-dollar costing pills.

According to experts from President Obama's Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS and the Public Health Service, many states imposed restrictions on the drugs that were inconsistent with guidelines issued by the Department of Veterans Affairs and health care professionals.

The advisory council did not mention how to pay for an increased use of the drugs but emphasized that Medicaid and public programs should disclose prices paid. Even for manufacturers, the development and production costs of the drugs should also be disclosed.

According to the advisory council, the restricted access to the treatment of Hepatitis C is "unreasonable and discriminatory." It also said that they are "not supported by medical evidence."

"While insurers have discretion to establish certain limitations on the provision of drugs, they are not permitted to excessively or unreasonably restrict coverage of effective treatments for patients with HCV," the council [wrote](#) in a letter to Obama. It states

eliminated these restrictions, treatment for low-income citizens on Medicaid are not delayed or denied. It also adds that clinical evidence and treatment recommendations should be the basis of limitations.

The CDC also expressed its concern about limited access to the new Hepatitis C treatments, in a survey of state laws.

According to some administration officials, however, they also want to provide a wider access to the new Hepatitis C drugs, but factors like the financial effect on the federal government have to be considered. At least half of the cost for Medicaid patients in every state is paid for by the federal government.

They also added that directives of Hepatitis drugs coverage by Medicaid may set a precedent that would affect new drugs for other conditions.

Other new drugs for Hepatitis C include AbbVie's *Viekira Pak* and Bristol-Myers Squibb's *Daklinza*.