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June 13, 2016

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California Department of Public Health  
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**RE: AB 2179 (Gipson) – Hepatitis C Counseling and Testing (Support)**

Dear Dr. Smith:

The California Conference of Local Health Officers (CCLHO) voted at the CCLHO Board meeting on June 2, 2016 to take a Support recommendation on AB 2179 (Gipson), a bill that would create a designation of Hepatitis C (HCV) Counselor and allow these Counselors to perform CLIA-waived HCV tests if they meet specified requirements.

Hepatitis C is an important public health issue, which leads to serious morbidity and mortality. It is the most common chronic blood-borne infection in the United States and a leading cause of chronic hepatitis, cirrhosis and liver cancer. It leads to an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 deaths per year in the U.S. AB 2179 seeks to expand the availability of HCV testing in community settings by developing a process by which individuals who wish to conduct HCV tests can complete a standalone HCV training program and be certified as an HCV Counselor.

The issue of HCV testing, which is addressed by the bill, is also an important issue for local health jurisdictions. Most people who become infected with Hepatitis C are chronically infected, but many are not aware that they are, and can transmit the virus to others. Potential benefits of testing include earlier identification and treatment; provision of preventive services such as hepatitis A and B vaccinations; and behavioral changes that can improve health outcomes for people with chronic HCV infection (i.e., alcohol reduction or cessation). Furthermore, individuals who know that they are infected may take steps to prevent transmission to others. AB 2179 seeks to address current barriers to offering Hepatitis C testing in non-medical sites to reduce HCV infections, improve health outcomes, reduce disparities and help prevent HCV transmission.

As you are aware, CCLHO was established in statute in 1947 to advise the California Department of Health Services (now the California Department of Public Health), other departments, boards, and commissions, as well as officials of federal, state and local agencies, the Legislature and other organizations on all matters affecting health. CCLHO membership consists of all legally appointed physician health officers in California's 61 city and county jurisdictions.

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This position of support for HCV counseling and testing is consistent with CCLHO's strategic priority of taking a leadership role in the practice of public health and policy development, as well as CCLHO's legislative priority of legislation that affects specific vulnerable populations.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 510-981-5301 or at [jberreman@ci.berkeley.ca.us](mailto:jberreman@ci.berkeley.ca.us) or at. Thank you.

Sincerely,

*Original signed by Dr. Janet Berreman*

Janet Berreman, MD, MPH  
President, California Conference of Local Health Officers