



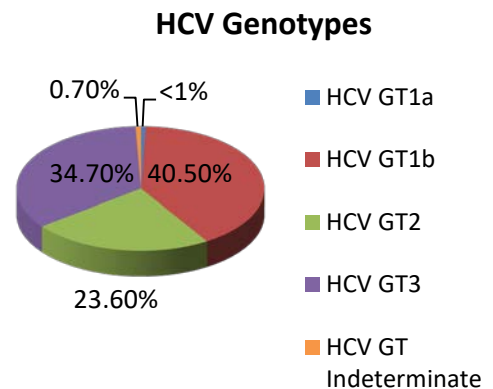
## GEORGIA Brief 2020

# Hepatitis C Elimination in Georgia

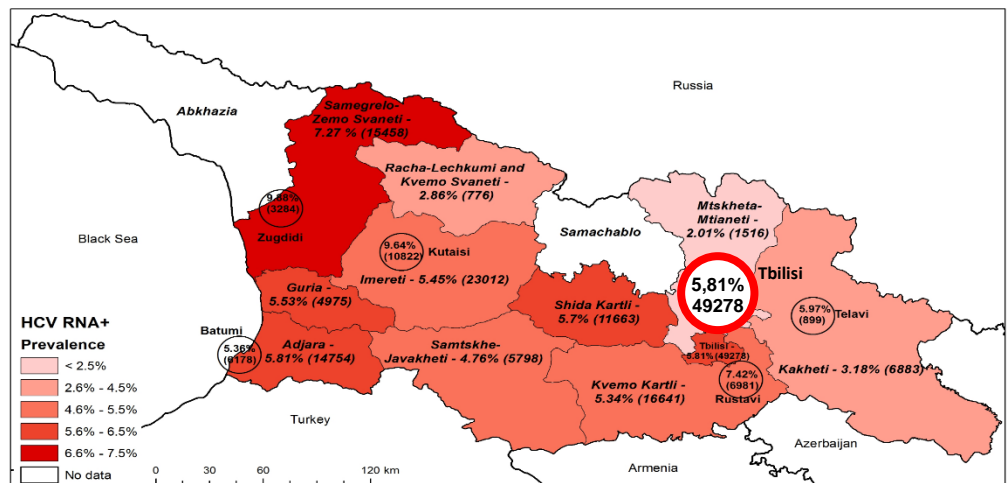
Based on available data, Georgia is among the countries with high hepatitis C (HCV) Prevalence, however, the reasons of the high burden of the disease has not been studied sufficiently. Collapse of the health care system in 1990s, sub-optimal quality standards of health services had negative influence on safe injection practices, infection control and blood safety in health care settings over the years. All these conditions along with the widespread practice of needle sharing among people who inject drugs (PWID) contributed to the spread of HCV in the general population.

According to the population-based seroprevalence survey, conducted by the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health (NCDC) and US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 2015, estimated national seroprevalence of hepatitis C is 7.7% and the prevalence of active disease is 5.4%.

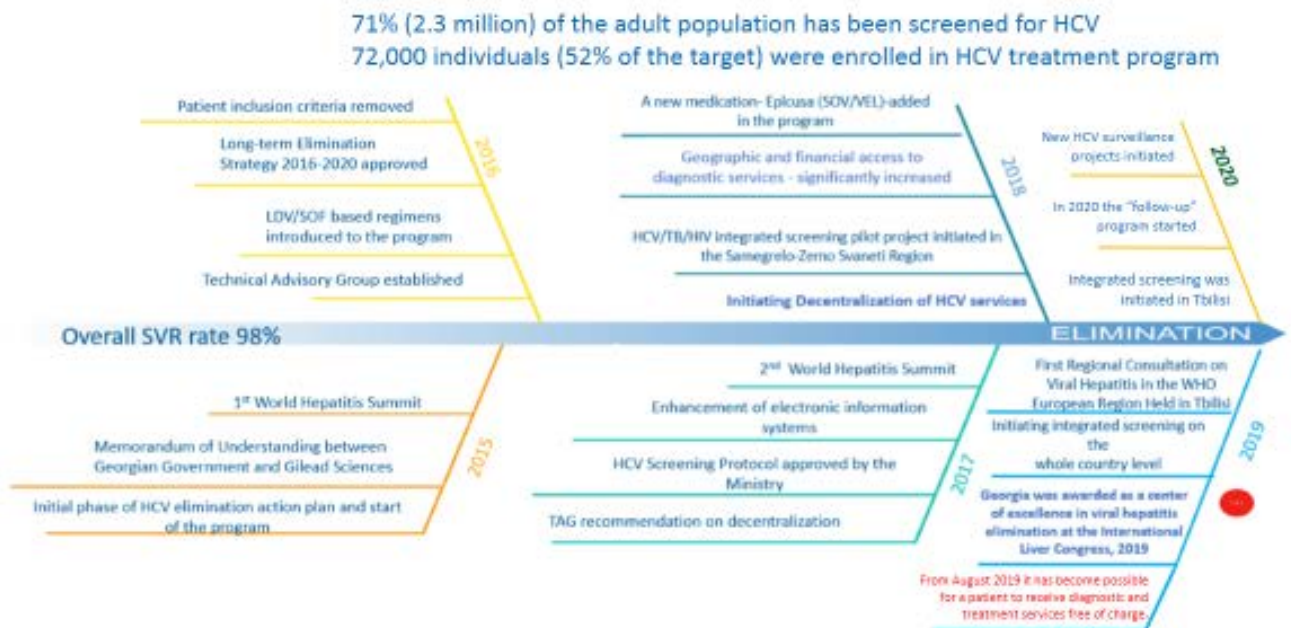
Characteristic	n	Weighted %	Estimated number of adults $\geq 18$
Anti-HCV+	425	7.7%	215,000
HCV RNA+	311	5.4%	150,300



### Prevalence and Estimated Number of HCV RNA+ Individuals by Regions and Cities



# Progress Towards HCV Elimination



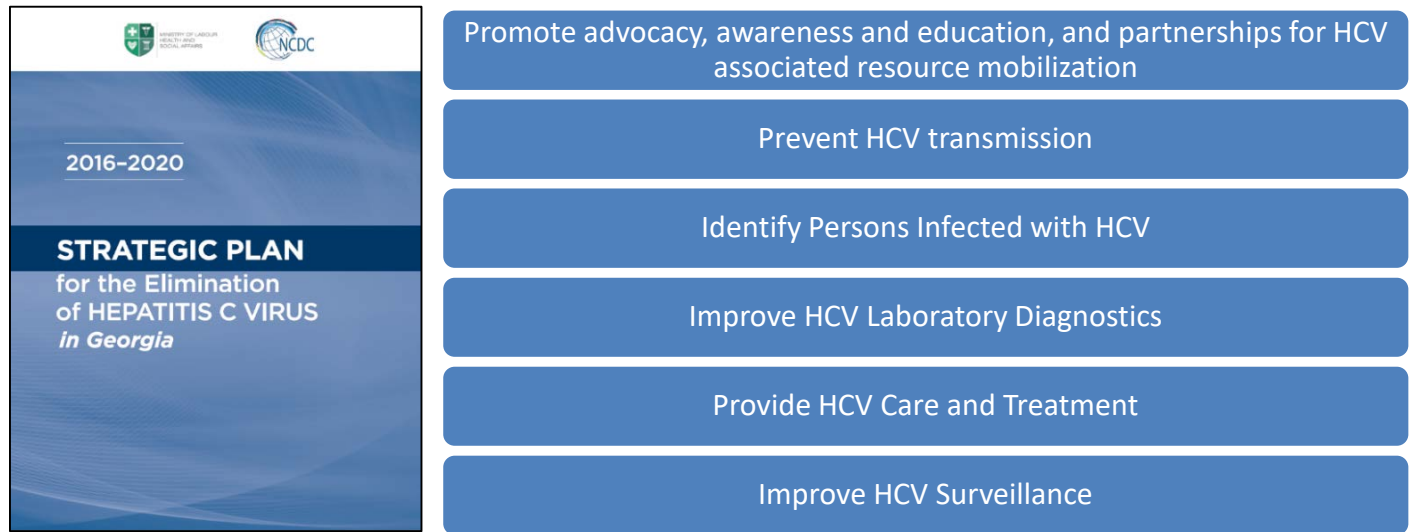
- The Government of Georgia, with strong support from US CDC and other international partners, declared intention to eliminate hepatitis C in Georgia. The national Hepatitis C elimination program became operational in 2015.
- Over the past decade, the Government of Georgia substantially stepped up its efforts against hepatitis C by implementing national programs such as free of charge hepatitis C treatment for HIV/HCV co-infected patients (funded under the Global Fund HIV Program since 2011); Free of charge hepatitis C treatment at the penitentiary system and 60% price reduction on combination of pegylated interferon and ribavirin for the general population.
- In February 2014, Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia (MoLHSA) initiated discussion regarding strengthening Hepatitis C response in the country with US partners.
- In 2014, the Georgian Government started negotiation with pharmaceutical company Gilead Sciences, Inc. which is one of the global leaders in research and manufacturing of potent direct acting antiviral drugs (DAAs), including Sofosbuvir and fixed-dose combination of Ledipasvir/Sofosbuvir, regarding possible elimination of HCV in Georgia.
- Under the MoLHSA, a special commission on HCV was established that is in charge of overall coordination of national HCV elimination movement. In addition, a working group of experts was created to elaborate national strategy and action plan for HCV elimination. National Program for Short-term/urgent Measures of Hepatitis C Elimination Action Plan for Georgia was developed.
- **Memorandum of Understanding** between the Government of Georgia and US pharmaceutical company Gilead Sciences, Inc. was prepared and officially signed on April 21, 2015.
- **Population-based HCV seroprevalence survey** was conducted in May-August, 2015. It aimed to estimate the prevalence of HCV infection in the general population, to assess risk factors for HCV infection in Georgia, to describe HCV circulating genotypes and identify knowledge and perceptions towards hepatitis and its prevention and treatment. The survey estimated that **7.7%** of population is anti-HCV positive and **5.4%** is HCV RNA positive. Injection drug use and history of blood transfusion were identified as main risk-factors.
- **Long-term elimination strategy** for 2016-2020 was developed together with CDC based on WHO guidelines. Georgian government approved the document on August 18, 2016. Strategy set forth the following targets:
  - ✓ 90% of HCV infected persons have been tested for their infection



Official signing of Memorandum of Understanding, April 21, 2015

- ✓ 95% of people with chronic infection have received treatment, and
- ✓ 95% of persons who receive treatment are cured of their HCV.

Strategy included six main directions:



Georgia has increased efforts to strengthen each direction of the strategy:

- NCDC has started massive awareness campaigns. Short text messages (SMS) are regularly sent to invite population to the HCV screening. HCV Hotline was established at NCDC.
- Infection control and prevention monitoring and evaluation system has been established in medical and non-medical facilities. PWID and their sexual partners receive Regular screening services. Unified Blood Donor Electronic Database was developed.
- Georgian government scaled up screening activities. More than 800 sites, including inpatient and outpatient facilities, prisons, Georgian Harm Reduction Network (GHRN) centers, etc., provide HCV screening across the country. A unified electronic screening registry was created which captures data from all national and local HCV screening programs throughout Georgia. Data from the screening and treatment programs are linked by a unique identification number.
- NCDC referral laboratory – Richard Lugar Center for Public Health Research – conducts research activities for the simplification of HCV diagnostics, including studies on HCV cAg and various PCR approaches. External quality assessment system has been introduced.
- Starting with 4 service providers in 2015, currently 39 centers in different cities (including 1 center in penitentiary system) are providing diagnostic and treatment services to the elimination program beneficiaries.
- Efforts have been made in direction of strengthening HCV-related Surveillance, including microelimination among persons who have hemophilia and dialysis patients, identification and characterization of HCV-attributable hepatocellular carcinoma (in collaboration with US CDC). Several studies are underway.

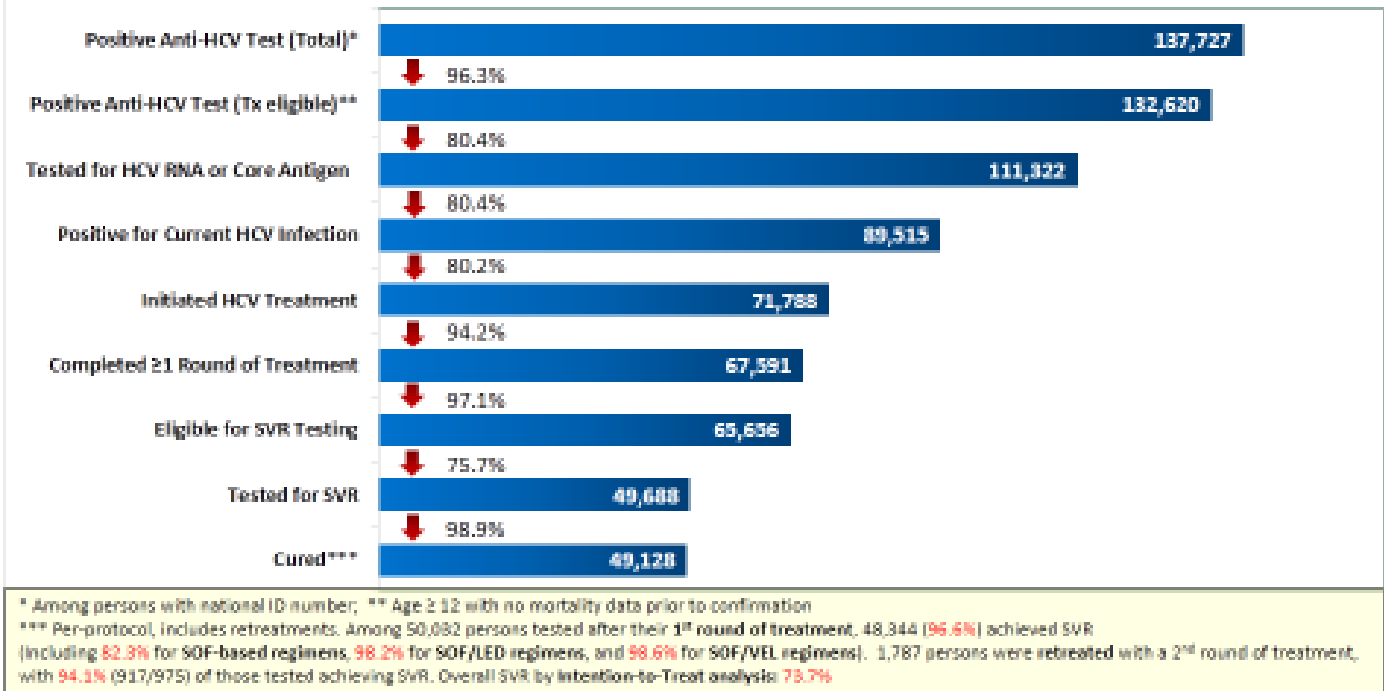
➤ Since 2014, National HCV Elimination Workshops are conducted every year, during the spring period. In 2015, the **Technical Advisory Group** (TAG) composed of 12 international experts, was established with support of the CDC. Every year, TAG discusses the progress towards elimination, monitors and evaluates indicators and provides recommendations on long-term elimination strategy.

➤ Since 2014, special side meetings are organized on annual meetings of European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL) to discuss the progress towards HCV elimination in Georgia.

➤ In August 2016, the **Clinical and Scientific Committees** were established with the aim of providing the volunteer leadership for the transparency and coordination of the research activities within Hepatitis C Elimination Program in Georgia. In total, 70 proposals were reviewed and 62 were approved by the Scientific Committee by the end of July 2020. Clinical guideline for management of hepatitis C infection was elaborated by the Clinical Committee.

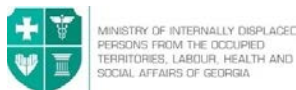
➤ Georgia was awarded the title of NOhep Visionary for the European Region at the World Hepatitis Summit in Sao Paulo, Brazil, on November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017. The NOhep Visionaries Programme is a global campaign which engages

## Georgia Hepatitis C Elimination Program Care Cascade, 28 April 2015 – 30 September 2020



governments to scale-up successful approaches to elimination and share key learnings, accelerating progress towards eliminating viral hepatitis by 2030.

- The NCDC supported the establishment of the ‘Cured Hepatitis C Patients’ Association’ which aims to facilitate the HCV Elimination Program by raising awareness, reducing the hepatitis C-associated stigma and discrimination among the population.
- In November 2017, Georgia initiated an integrated TB/HIV/HCV screening program at primary healthcare centers (PHC). Program was first piloted in Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti region and later was expanded to the entire country. The project significantly facilitated to increase the number of people who were screened for the three diseases.
- During 11-13 February, 2019 the First Regional Consultation on Viral Hepatitis in the WHO European Region - “Progress on the Way to Elimination” was conducted in Tbilisi, which aimed to review the countries’ progress, exchange good practices and identify challenges in order to overcome them in response to viral hepatitis, including national planning, surveillance and monitoring, prevention, testing and strengthening laboratory capacity, improving access to diagnostics and treatment and optimizing viral hepatitis management strategies in line with the updated WHO guidelines.
- Georgia was awarded as a center of excellence in viral hepatitis elimination at the International Liver Congress, 2019



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