A guide to writing letters to policymakers

Writing a letter to policymakers such as your local Member of Parliament (MP) can be a powerful way to advocate for issues that matter, such as improving testing, treatment and prevention for hepatitis C in prisons. Here's a step-by-step guide on how to craft an effective letter:

1. **Introduction**
   Begin your letter by addressing your MP respectfully. Use their full name and official title (e.g., "Dear [MP's Name], Member of Parliament for [Constituency]"). Introduce yourself briefly and explain the purpose of your letter. Clearly state that you are concerned about the current state of hepatitis C testing, treatment and prevention in prisons.

2. **Personal story or connection**
   Share your personal connection to the issue if applicable. Have you or someone you know been affected by hepatitis C? Sharing personal stories can add a human element to your letter and make your concerns more relatable.

3. **Background information**
   Provide some background information about hepatitis C, its prevalence in prisons, and the importance of early detection and treatment, in particular among people in prison. Include statistics or research findings to support your points. Explain why better testing, treatment and prevention are crucial not only for the health of people in prison but also for public health as a whole.

4. **Highlight the problem**
   Clearly outline the existing gaps or challenges in hepatitis C testing and treatment in prisons. Discuss any barriers that currently prevent people living in prison from accessing adequate healthcare services for hepatitis C, such as absence of services, limited resources, stigma, or lack of awareness.

5. **Use statistics**
   Statistics can add weight to your letter. You can source global statistics about HCV burden, but country-level, regional or even local statistics can be even more powerful. Some useful websites for sourcing statistics on HCV burden include the Coalition for Global Hepatitis Elimination country data profiles.

6. **Proposed solutions**
   Offer specific recommendations or solutions for improving hepatitis C testing, treatment and prevention in prisons. This could include implementing routine screening programs, leveraging existing services (such as those for HIV), utilising rapid point-of-care testing, increasing access to antiviral medications and harm reduction interventions, providing education and training for healthcare staff, and/or addressing stigma and discrimination against affected individuals.

7. **Call to action**
   Clearly state what you would like your MP to do in response to your letter. This could be advocating for policy changes, allocating funding for hepatitis C programs in prisons, or raising awareness of the issue within the government.

8. **Thank you and follow-up**
   Express gratitude for your MP's attention to this important issue and for considering your perspective. Be clear about your expectations for follow up such as 'In your follow up kindly provide details on your plans to handle these issues. If it's not within your capacity or scope to address personally, I kindly ask that you elevate my concerns to the appropriate Ministers or departments.'

9. **Formatting and Presentation**
   Keep your letter concise and to the point, ideally no longer than one page. Use clear and polite language, and proofread your letter for any grammatical or spelling errors. Your letter should be saved in a PDF format. You may also consider including relevant attachments or documents like an infographic to support your arguments.

10. **Sending Your Letter**
    Send your letter via email or traditional mail to your MP's office. Be sure to address it to the correct office address and include your return address for correspondence. Follow up with your MP's office if you haven't received a response within a reasonable timeframe, for example, 2-4 weeks.

By following these steps and drafting a compelling letter, you can effectively raise awareness of the need for better hepatitis C testing, treatment and prevention in prisons and advocate for positive change within your community.

This project was funded by a grant from Gilead Sciences. Gilead Sciences had no input into the content, tone, emphasis or selection of the models profiled.