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Disparities in healthcare access, medical outcomes, and specific chronic diseases have been documented for African-American and Hispanic individuals in comparison with non-Hispanic whites. What may be less well known are those health disparities related to common blood-borne pathogens such as hepatitis B virus (HBV) and hepatitis C virus (HCV). Several studies have shown that African-American and Hispanic injection drug users (IDU) have higher prevalence rates of these blood-borne pathogens, in addition to higher prevalence rates of HIV infection and AIDS cases. These blood-borne pathogens may contribute to the increased morbidity and mortality among African-American and Hispanic IDU, and perhaps also that of their sexual partners. This article reviews some of what is currently known about the epidemiology of HIV, AIDS, HBV, and HCV among African-American and Hispanic individuals, in general, and IDU in particular. In order to reduce or eliminate these health disparities a comprehensive approach is required that includes case finding, pre and post-test counseling, clinical treatment and management, and community-based behavioral or structural interventions.

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Half of new HIV infections in the United States are in individuals aged 13 to 24 years, accounting for 20,000 new infections annually, or 1 every hour. Two thirds of infected youth contract HIV sexually, and more than 60% of new infections are in young women. Approximately 75% of infected youth are in racial or ethnic minority groups. More than one third of HIV-infected young people have not been tested for HIV

infection, and the majority of homosexual HIV-infected youth are unaware of their infection status. Increased efforts are needed in comprehensive sex education, including safer sex practices, bringing young people into health care networks, increasing health care provider awareness of risk, and extending counseling and testing to young people. This article summarizes a presentation by Donna Futterman, MD, at the 7th Annual Clinical Conference for Ryan White CARE Act Title I, II, III, and IV Grantees, held in August 2004 in Washington, DC.

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