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Promoting Awareness of New Eligibility Criteria

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) provides oversight of America's blood supply. The FDA recently finalized two significant changes to donor eligibility requirements that safely expand the number of individuals who can donate blood, including:

- Removal of the indefinite deferral for risk of exposure to Variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease or Mad Cow disease.
- Establishment of individual donor risk assessments that eliminate the previous prohibition on gay and bisexual men donating blood.

The blood community supports these changes.

- The blood community has long advocated for changes to donor eligibility that promote the safety of America's blood supply while making blood donation more inclusive.
- Recent donor eligibility changes are a result of a lengthy evidence-based process of welcoming previously deferred individuals as blood donors. Blood centers are now actively working to increase awareness among newly-eligible individuals.
- Whenever FDA updates the donor eligibility requirements, blood centers must undertake extensive changes before welcoming back impacted donors. These include but are not limited to; updating the Donor History Questionnaire, computer systems, procedures and policies, staff training, and informational and educational materials for donors.

The FDA changes come at a critical time for the blood supply when inventories remain critically low.

- Currently, only 3% of Americans donate blood each year despite 65% of Americans being eligible to do so.
- Blood centers regularly have 3 or less days of supply on hand, putting both routine and emergency care at risk.

Federal funding directed locally has shown to generate significant results in the recruitment of first-time and repeat blood donors.

- Efforts to increase public awareness about the new donor eligibility requirements are constrained by a lack of funding. Increased outreach is needed to community organizations such as veterans' organizations (since many of the donors deferred for risk of exposure to vCJD are either military or veterans and their families) and LGBTQ+ organizations.
- During the collection of COVID-19 Convalescent Plasma (CCP), federal funding (through a contract with America's Blood Centers) for local public awareness resulted in a 244% increase in CCP collection in a 20-week period.

To reach as many impacted donors as possible, America's Blood Centers is asking Congress to provide targeted federal funding that can be used locally by blood centers to amplify their education and awareness efforts.

Sources:
<https://www.fda.gov/regulatory-information/search-fda-guidance-documents/recommendations-reduce-possible-risk-transmission-creutzfeldt-jakob-disease-and-variant-creutzfeldt>
<https://www.fda.gov/regulatory-information/search-fda-guidance-documents/implementation-acceptable-full-length-and-abbreviated-donor-history-questionnaires-and-accompanying>