

END THE EPIDEMICS

Californians Mobilizing to End HIV,
STIs, Viral Hepatitis & Overdose

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State Budget Includes Investments to Address Syphilis and Hepatitis B, Leaves Out Urgently Needed Funding for Harm Reduction and Hepatitis C

June 30, 2022 – End the Epidemics, a coalition of over 150 organizations, responded to the final state budget agreement with mixed reactions. The final budget includes \$30 million over 3 years to address the state’s syphilis and congenital syphilis crisis, and invests \$8 million over 3 years to make progress toward the elimination of hepatitis B. However, Governor Newsom and Legislators failed to include any new funding to address the state’s growing hepatitis C epidemic, close the STI coverage gap for LGBTQ+ Californians, or support desperately needed harm reduction services for people who use drugs. This comes at a time when overdose deaths have reached historic highs – primarily impacting Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) – and harm reduction programs across the state could be forced to lay off staff and cut services as early as next year.

“Over the past several years, state lawmakers have recognized the growing STI epidemic and made critical investments to expand access to testing and treatment. This could not be more important for the LGBTQ+ community, as gay and bisexual men continue to account for the majority of new syphilis cases,” said **APLA Health Chief Executive Officer Craig E. Thompson**. “The additional \$30 million included in this year’s budget will bring even more desperately needed resources to LA County and other parts of the state that bear a disproportionate burden of syphilis and congenital syphilis. We are tremendously grateful to Assemblymember Evan Low and the Legislative LGBTQ+ Caucus for championing these urgent requests. At the same time, we are deeply concerned that the budget lacks adequate resources to address the state’s growing overdose crisis, particularly in communities of color. Harm reduction programs are on the front lines serving some of the most vulnerable and underserved members of our communities. We call on Governor Newsom and the Legislature to take immediate action to ensure that these programs are not left to fend for themselves as overdose deaths continue to skyrocket.”

“San Francisco AIDS Foundation thanks the Governor and California State Legislature for prioritizing the prevention and treatment of syphilis, congenital syphilis, and hepatitis B in the final California budget agreement. We are outraged, however, that End the Epidemics’ funding requests for harm reduction, hepatitis C testing and linkage, and the Family PACT expansion were not included and the Governor has, for the second year, refused to fund the Health Equity and Racial Justice Fund – despite a record state budget surplus, said **San Francisco AIDS Foundation Chief Executive Officer Tyler TerMeer, PhD**. “California is in the midst of an overdose crisis that is killing thousands of Californians every year. There is a clear moral imperative to fund critical harm reduction and overdose prevention measures that will save lives.

The choice to exclude funding for harm reduction, hepatitis C, STI services for LGBTQ+ people, and community-based health equity initiatives fails California's most vulnerable communities, many who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color."

"National Harm Reduction Coalition is outraged by the lack of continued investment in the California Harm Reduction Initiative. As the overdose crisis rages on in our state – heavily impacting BIPOC communities – it is negligent not to invest in evidenced-based strategies like harm reduction," said **National Harm Reduction Coalition's Associate Director of Community Mobilization, Jenna Haywood**. "Now is not the time to cut the only state investment in harm reduction program staffing and instead the state should be expanding this low barrier, low-cost intervention on overdose and other drug related harms. The message this budget sends is that people who use drugs' lives are disposable and that especially BIPOC lives are disposable."

"The Los Angeles LGBT Center applauds the inclusion of state funds in this year's budget that will help to address the surging STI epidemic in California. These funds are crucial in helping community-based organizations expand access to some of the most disadvantaged members of our community – LGBTQ+, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color," said the **Los Angeles LGBT Center's Director of Policy and Community Building, Joey Espinoza-Hernández**. "It is clear that there is more work ahead in terms of overdose prevention as we work collectively to see an end to these epidemics. We must focus on evidenced-based solutions to end to the syndemic."

"GLIDE is grateful to the State Legislature for ensuring California's most vulnerable populations — including communities that GLIDE serves — are supported with critical access to STI testing. With historic levels of investments for these public health measures, GLIDE can continue providing our clients with the vital community health resources they need," said **GLIDE Foundation's Senior Director of the Center for Social Justice, Miguel Bustos**. "While expanded funding for STI testing access is welcomed, it is disappointing the budget does not do more to address the state's overdose crisis and provide desperately needed services to communities of color and people who use drugs. A harm reduction practice leader, GLIDE advocates for evidence-based overdose prevention approaches to minimize the harm associated with drug use rather than criminalization. The state must do more to address this ongoing public health crisis and help the most vulnerable among us."

As LGBTQ+ and reproductive rights are systematically being reversed across the country, End the Epidemics' commitment to racial justice and health equity is now more important than ever. The coalition will continue to mobilize and call on Governor Newsom and Legislators to allocate the resources needed to achieve true health equity for the communities we serve, including BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and people who use drugs. Health justice is racial justice and it is at the core of what we do.

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ABOUT END THE EPIDEMICS:

End the Epidemics: Californians Mobilizing to End HIV, STIs, Viral Hepatitis, and Overdose (ETE) is a statewide coalition that advocates for anti-racist policies and funding priorities to eliminate health inequities among Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) while working collaboratively to end the syndemic of HIV, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), viral hepatitis, and overdose in California. For more information about ETE visit eteca.org.