

# California Fiscal Year 2023-24 Budget Includes Investments to Address Drug Overdose and Hepatitis C in California

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July 27, 2023 - End The Epidemics (ETE) and California Syringe Exchange Programs (CASEP) celebrate the investment of \$61 million for harm reduction programs and \$10 million for hepatitis C (HCV) testing, linkage to care, and navigation services in the final California Fiscal Year 2023-24 budget.

The budget victory comes after [sustained grassroots advocacy by both ETE and CASEP](#), including a successful “Day of Action” in Sacramento that gathered 125 advocates impacted by the opioid crisis and HCV to illustrate the need for increased funding to state elected officials.

The California Overdose Surveillance Dashboard estimates that [7,175 people have died of opioid overdose since 2021](#). Evidence-based harm reduction strategies have proven effective in lowering transmission of HIV and hepatitis C and reducing stigma and other barriers to receiving care. Pilot programs in California, like the [California Harm Reduction Initiative](#), have saved lives and given people access to treatment.

Thanks to leadership from Assemblyman Chris Holden, Senator Scott Wiener, and the LGBTQ Caucus, a portion of the state’s Opioid Settlement Fund will be used to continue funding syringe access and other harm reduction services over the next four years through the California Overdose Prevention and Harm Reduction Initiative (COPHRI).

Senators John Laird, Scott Wiener, and Susan Rubio and the LGBTQ+ Caucus ensured the inclusion of one-time \$10 million from the general fund for HCV testing, linkage to care and navigation services, focused on those most impacted with significant barriers to the traditional health care system, including young people using drugs, BIPOC communities, people who are unhoused, and those with carceral experience.

Despite having a simple, effective cure for HCV since 2014, the Center for Disease Control estimates that nationwide [2 million people have untreated HCV](#). Only 1 in 3 people with insurance get timely HCV treatment, those enrolled in Medicaid are 46% less likely to get treatment than those with private insurance, and Medicaid beneficiaries of other races are 27% less likely to get treatment than white

recipients. Barriers to treatment, including lack of health care insurance, racial and ethnic discrimination, and stigma, intersect to worsen health outcomes for vulnerable Californians.

ETE and CASEP are grateful to the Legislature and Governor Gavin Newsom for approving and signing the budget with funding that will save lives and help move California toward ending drug overdose and HCV.

#### About End the Epidemics (ETE)

End The Epidemics (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, STIs, viral hepatitis, and overdose in California.

#### About California Syringe Exchange Programs (CASEP)

California Syringe Exchange Programs Coalition (CASEP) is a mutual-aid and advocacy network of syringe services providers and participants who work collectively to build strong harm reduction programs and organize to reduce the harms of the racialized war on drugs and drug use at the individual and community level.

#### Quotes:

Los Angeles LGBT Community Center:

“Thank you to Governor Newsom and the California Legislature for funding harm reduction and Hepatitis C interventions, which will unquestionably save countless lives,” said CEO Joe Hollendonner. “While our state faces real financial challenges, I am proud that California continues to recognize that excluding funding for the life-or-death issues facing the most vulnerable is not the answer. We look forward to working with the State in the implementation of these funds and seeing firsthand the positive impact on our communities.”

Liver Coalition of San Diego:

“We applaud the State Legislature and Governor for including these funds in the budget. However modest they may seem, they are historic for harm reduction and hepatitis C program funding in California,” said Scott Suckow, Executive Director of the Liver Coalition of San Diego. “These state funded programs are only a start, when the proposed Federal funding is appropriated to support the National Hepatitis C Elimination Plan, California will have a solid foundation to implement that plan.”

GLIDE:

“GLIDE commends Senator Wiener, Assemblymember Holden, Governor Newsom, and the Legislature for approving this funding and affirming their commitment to evidence-based, lifesaving services,” said Holly Joshi, Senior Director of the Center for Social Justice at GLIDE. “We are thrilled that California will continue and expand these critical investments, ensuring that communities across the state receive the vital supports necessary to prevent overdose, connect to substance use treatment, and prevent and treat Hepatitis C. Putting resources and tools in the hands of community-based organizations and peer-led interventions is a powerful and effective strategy to increase health and safety and save lives.”

SF Hep B Free:

"As Executive Director of SF Hep B Free, an organization that fights hepatitis B and the liver cancer it causes, we are thrilled to see the legislature support these vital investments in the fight against hepatitis and harm reduction," said Richard So, Executive Director. "In this difficult climate, it shows us that our leaders are interested in smart, proven investments in prevention and recovery for major health issues in the state. It also shows that leaders embrace and understand the advantage of longer term but cost effective and cost saving programs that will save lives and state funding over time. We hope the state will continue to invest in programs working on these diseases."

APLA Health:

"APLA Health applauds the Governor's decision to approve increased funding for harm reduction programs and hepatitis C (HCV) treatment in his FY 23-24 budget," says APLA Health, CEO Craig T. Thompson. "This funding is essential to curbing overdose deaths in California and to ending the ongoing epidemics of HIV, HCV, and STIs, especially among disproportionately impacted communities. This new funding marks yet another victory for the Ending the Epidemics and California Syringe Exchange Program coalitions, which will continue to advocate for common-sense solutions to address opioids and other drug use and to a robust state response to the crisis in the sexual health of all Californians."

San Francisco AIDS Foundation:

"We extend our thanks to the Governor and the Legislature for securing significant funding to address two priority health issues for California—HCV and overdose," said Tyler TerMeer, PhD, CEO of San Francisco AIDS Foundation. "These investments will help to ensure that our state will be able to make progress in reducing overdose deaths and ensuring that all people living with HCV have access to lifesaving cure treatments."

Equality California:

"We are thrilled to see the Governor and Legislature prioritize funding for essential public health services in the 2023-24 State Budget," said Equality California Executive Director Tony Hoang. "With California's overdose epidemic at crisis levels, the additional investments in harm reduction and Hepatitis C services will go a long way toward ensuring that frontline community-based organizations have the resources they need to better serve communities of color, people experiencing homelessness, and other impacted populations."

Black Women for Wellness:

"As Black Women for Wellness, a dedicated reproductive justice organization, we celebrate the budget victories that hold tremendous significance for our community. The allocation of \$10 million for HCV screening and linkage to care addresses healthcare disparities for Black women disproportionately impacted by Hepatitis C. Additionally, securing \$61 million over four years from opioid settlement funds for the California Harm Reduction Initiative supports harm reduction efforts, addressing the opioid crisis within our communities. These remarkable achievements during a challenging budget deficit year exemplify our unwavering resilience and commitment to health equity for Black women and girls. We extend heartfelt gratitude to all supporters, lawmakers, and allies for standing with us on this journey towards a healthier and more inclusive California."

Access Support Network of Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and Monterey Counties:

“We applaud the inclusion of significant funding for hepatitis C testing and linkage to care in the state budget,” said David Kilburn, Executive Director. “In our HCV outreach, testing, and linkage to care services in Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and Monterey Counties, we see firsthand the challenges faced by communities disproportionately impacted by the epidemic. This funding will help us and address these barriers and help people with HCV access lifesaving care and treatment.”

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