

END THE EPIDEMICS

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

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State Budget Includes an Additional \$13 Million to End the Epidemics of HIV, STIs, Viral Hepatitis and Overdose

Investments move California in the right direction, but state leaders failed to close coverage gap for STI services for low-income LGBTQ+ Californians

July 27, 2021 – The [FY 2021-22 State Budget](#) signed today by Governor Newsom includes an additional \$13 million to end the epidemics of HIV, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), viral hepatitis and overdose. These investments will help to address skyrocketing STI rates, improve access to harm reduction services for people who use drugs, identify people living with hepatitis C and link them to the cure, develop innovative programs for people aging with HIV, and address persistent inequities in use of HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). Regrettably, the budget does not include a critical expansion of the state's Family PACT program that would have increased access to STI testing and treatment services for low-income LGBTQ+ Californians.

California Legislative LGBTQ+ Caucus Chair Assemblymember Evan Low (D-Silicon Valley) and Vice Chair Senator Susan Talamantes Eggman (D-Stockton) championed these budget requests from the statewide End the Epidemics coalition, with strong support from other members of the LGBTQ+ Caucus, Senate President pro Tempore Toni G. Atkins (D-San Diego), Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon (D-Lakewood), Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee Chair Nancy Skinner (D-Berkeley), Assembly Budget Committee Chair Phil Ting (D-San Francisco), and Assembly Budget Subcommittee on Health and Human Services Chair Joaquin Arambula (D-Fresno).

Specifically, the FY 2021-22 State Budget includes:

- \$4 million for local health departments to address skyrocketing STI rates. More than 325,000 Californians were diagnosed with syphilis, chlamydia, or gonorrhea in 2019 – up 40% since 2013. This funding will provide local health departments with desperately needed resources to address the growing STI crisis. Beginning in FY 2022-23, the budget will include an additional \$10 million annually for these activities.
- \$3 million annually for the Syringe Exchange Supply Clearinghouse. California syringe service programs are a crucial component of our public health response to HIV, viral hepatitis, and overdose. This funding will ensure that the Syringe Exchange Supply Clearinghouse has adequate supplies to meet the rapid expansion of syringe service programs and the increased number of people seeking services.

- \$1 million to purchase hepatitis C test kits and train personnel to administer the tests. The hepatitis C epidemic continues to grow at an alarming rate, particularly among young Californians. This funding will fund the purchase of hepatitis C test kits and train personnel so that community-based organizations and local health departments can help the most vulnerable Californians know their status and get linked to the cure.
- \$5 million to establish HIV and aging demonstration projects. Over 50% of people living with HIV in California are now aged 50+. While people aging with HIV confront many of the same challenges as other older adults, they also face a unique set of challenges because of their HIV status. This funding will support the development of innovative programs and services to address the unique needs of this rapidly growing population.
- Expansion of the state's PrEP Assistance Program (PrEP-AP) to fund navigation and retention coordinators. Just over 20% of people who could benefit from PrEP are currently taking it and PrEP use is lowest among Black, Indigenous and people of color. This funding will support PrEP navigation and retention coordinators and related services to help the most vulnerable Californians access and remain adherent to PrEP.

Although included in the Legislature's joint budget agreement, the final budget does not include funding to expand access to STI services through the state's Family PACT program for those who are not at risk for experiencing or causing an unintended pregnancy. Family PACT currently covers STI services for low-income, uninsured individuals, but only within the context of a family planning visit. The group most negatively impacted by this structural inequity are LGBTQ+ Californians who have reported being turned away or asked to pay for STI services because they did not need contraception and were therefore ineligible for the program. Expanding the eligibility for STI services under Family PACT is a feasible, cost-effective and equitable pathway to STI coverage for the LGBTQ+ community.

"We extend our thanks to the Legislature and the Governor for including a \$13 million investment in the budget to address the epidemics of HIV, viral hepatitis, STIs and overdose in California," said Kevin Rogers, Interim Chief Executive Officer of San Francisco AIDS Foundation. "These investments are essential to ensure that community-based organizations and local health jurisdictions stretched thin by the COVID-19 pandemic can continue to provide life-saving services for those most vulnerable to these conditions. We are deeply disappointed, however, that the budget agreement failed to recognize the need and provide the funding to expand California's Family PACT program to provide critical STI testing and treatment services for the LGBTQ+ community. This is funding we will continue to advocate for, and we look forward to working with the Legislature to ensure that this funding is included in next year's budget."

"Over the past year, community-based organizations and local health departments have been stretched to their limits as they attempt to respond to COVID-19 and maintain adequate services to address HIV, STIs, viral hepatitis and overdose," said APLA Health Chief Executive Officer Craig E. Thompson. "Now, with the worst of the pandemic behind us, it's time to get serious about addressing these other public health crises that have been neglected for far too long. APLA Health applauds Governor Newsom and the Legislature for these critical and necessary investments that will again move the state in the right direction and help to address longstanding health inequities in LGBTQ+ and BIPOC communities. Still, we are disappointed that lawmakers did not expand access to STI testing and treatment through the state's Family PACT program and we will continue advocating for desperately needed funding for STI services."

"Long before we had the COVID-19 pandemic, California's STI rates reached epidemic levels and rose to historic highs. We applaud state leaders for leveraging our historic budget surplus to enhance the

capacity of local health jurisdictions to address this public health crisis that has gone ignored for far too long,” said Amy Moy, Chief External Affairs Officer at Essential Access Health. “Although progress has been made, we are deeply disappointed that the administration and legislative leaders stopped short – and during Pride Month – failed to expand STI coverage and care for uninsured and low-income LGBTQ+ Californians. This is a missed opportunity to align state policy with the administration and legislature’s stated commitments regarding health access and equity. We will continue to advocate to close the STI coverage gap to improve health outcomes and ensure a more equitable health system that doesn’t exclude any patient from affordable care based on who they love, or how they identify.”

“Today, Governor Newsom and the California Legislature made progress in the Golden State's fight to end the epidemics of HIV, STIs, viral hepatitis and overdose — all of which disproportionately impact our LGBTQ+ friends, family and loved ones,” said Equality California Legislative Director Tami A. Martin. “Equality California and our partners in the End the Epidemics coalition have worked for years to lay the foundation for today’s investments, including the successful passage of SB 159 (Wiener) in 2019 to expand access to life-saving HIV prevention medications PrEP and PEP, and advocating for SB 258 (Laird), which will ensure that older Californians living with HIV have access to the programs and services they need. We know that there is hard work ahead, but thanks to Governor Newsom, our legislative champions and numerous community-based advocates, California is taking positive steps to end these epidemics for good.”

"Members of our LGBTQ+ community, particularly Black and Latino gay and bisexual men and transgender women of color, are disproportionately impacted by HIV, STIs, and overdose. Compared to their heterosexual counterparts, they more often struggle to gain access to quality healthcare," said Los Angeles LGBT Center Director of Policy and Community Building Terra Russell-Slavin. "By including these significant public health investments in his budget, Governor Newsom is steering California in the right direction, and at the same time we must continue to push for more, including the expansion of Family PACT, as we strive to end these epidemics once and for all."

"Far too often cis and trans women of color are disproportionately impacted by HIV, STIs, overdose and other preventable health conditions," said WORLD Interim Director Ingrid Floyd. "This investment in public health will get us closer to ensuring all women are included as we End the Epidemics. Women Organized to Respond to Life-threatening Diseases (WORLD) thanks and applauds the Legislature and Governor for supporting these budget requests at a critical juncture in turning the tide to end this syndemic in California, for as we have experienced, 'Racial Justice is Health Justice'."

"Increasing our investments and support for our syringe access programs and people who use drugs is the right thing to do now," said National Harm Reduction Coalition Senior Director of Capacity Building and Community Mobilization Laura Guzman. "Our syringe service programs have become key points of access to services for vulnerable, underserved and unhoused people in California, and they have collectively witnessed a critical increase in the demand for additional syringes and other supplies that keep our communities safe and help address the overdose crisis. National Harm Reduction Coalition thanks the Legislature and Governor Newsom for this investment in drug users' health this year, and into the future."

More details about the budget agreement can be found [here](#).

End the Epidemics: Californians Mobilizing to End HIV, STIs, Viral Hepatitis, and Overdose 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, viral hepatitis, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and overdose in California.