

# COMP



California Opioid  
Maintenance Providers

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## **Sheriffs, Health and Narcotics Officers: Save Drug Medi-Cal Program; 28,000 Patients would relapse to drug addiction, crime**

SACRAMENTO – California’s sheriffs, health officers and narcotics officers today announced their opposition to the administration’s proposal to eliminate nearly the entire Drug Medi-Cal program to save \$53.4 million in state General Fund dollars. The May Revision proposal to eliminate nearly the entire Drug Medi-Cal program to save \$53.4 million in state General Fund dollars was rejected by the legislature. Eliminating methadone maintenance for tens of thousands of patients would have serious adverse impacts on the public safety and health of California. Not only would the state forfeit approximately \$150 million in federal matching funds, but more than 35,000 Californians would lose their regular source of drug treatment, leading to a statewide crisis for these individuals. The organizations joined other opponents in releasing a letter to the governor and the legislature stating that 28,000, or “eighty percent of the 35,000 patients in the drug treatment program, would relapse to drug use within a year, resulting in increase costs to the state of \$700 million to \$1 billion in drug-related public safety, criminal justice, emergency room and foster care costs.”

“Patients who lose their treatment source due to the elimination of this program are likely to seek out other narcotics or prescription drugs, such as oxycontin, to stave off withdrawal symptoms, and doing so without the oversight and structure this program provides,” said San Benito County Sheriff Curtis Hill, President of the California State Sheriffs’ Association. “The elimination of this program will also result in an unfunded program need at the local level. Counties will be hard-pressed to find a way to fund the treatment due to their own severe budget shortfalls. As research data indicates, many of these individuals will then wind up back in our local jails or state prison. The average annual cost per inmate in a county jail is \$40,000 and in state prison \$52,000, according to 2007-2008 data,

*COMP news release, August 18, 2010, page 2*

compared to an average annual cost of \$5,000 per patient for methadone maintenance in the Drug Medi-Cal program.”

“I am very concerned regarding the proposed elimination of methadone maintenance for Medi-Cal.” said Los Angeles County Sheriff Lee Baca. “This is a successful drug treatment maintenance program. The cost of eliminating this effort will significantly outweigh any short-term savings. I urge the administration to seriously reconsider this idea.”

“Patients in withdrawal will also show up in local emergency rooms across the state seeking methadone but will be unable to get it since emergency rooms are not licensed to dispense methadone for opiate dependence,” said Anne Lindsay, MD, president of the Health Officers Association of California. “Further, fragile patients will suffer catastrophic reactions causing them to seek hospitalization at public expense.”

“Since 55 percent of patients enrolled in medication-assisted treatment use Drug Medi-Cal to pay for their addiction treatment services, most if not all methadone clinics will close,” said Jason Kletter, Ph.D., president of COMP. “We anticipate a complete dismantling of the network of 142 statewide clinics that provide methadone treatment to approximately 35,000 patients.”

Approximately 3,000 people working in treatment programs will become unemployed, adding to ranks of the 2.3 million Californians currently unemployed.

Destroying the clinic network that has taken 30 years to develop will create significant problems when the economy recovers and tens of thousands of new Medi-Cal beneficiaries become eligible for treatment under new federal parity and health care reform legislation. These individuals will have no access to cost-effective addiction treatment services, putting significant pressure on the rest of the health care system.

For these reasons, the following organizations urge the preservation of the Drug Medi-Cal Program:

California Opioid Maintenance Providers (COMP), a coalition of community-based drug-treatment facilities, is joined in our opposition to this proposal by the California State Sheriffs’ Association; California Medical Association (CMA); Health Officers Association of California; California Nurses Association (CNA); California Narcotic Officers’ Association; California Society of Addiction Medicine (CSAM); California Psychiatric Association; California State

*COMP news release, August 18, 2010, page 3*

Association of Counties; Southern California Alcohol and Drug Programs; Drug Policy Alliance; AIDS Project LA; Project Inform; California Association for Alcohol Drug Program Executives; California Association of Addiction Recovery Resources; California Association for Alcohol/Drug Educators; and, California Association of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselors as well as the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy.

For more information, please visit [www.savemedi-caldrugtreatment.org](http://www.savemedi-caldrugtreatment.org)

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