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Contact: Steve Hopcraft, 916/457-5546; steve@hopcraft.com

Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month is not the time to eliminate Medi-Cal drug treatment funding

SACRAMENTO – California’s providers of drug treatment for tens of thousands of patients today applauded Governor Schwarzenegger’s proclamation of September as “Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month.”

"No month is the month to eliminate Medi-Cal drug treatment funding," said Jason Kletter, Ph.D., president of the California Opioid Maintenance Providers (COMP). The drug treatment providers and a coalition of sheriffs, narcotics officers and public health directors oppose the administration's proposal to eliminate nearly the entire Drug Medi-Cal program to save \$53.4 million in state General Fund dollars.

"We agree with the governor that alcohol and drug abuse is a serious disease that affects families, communities and the entire State of California, and that we all bear the burden of prosecuting and incarcerating criminals for drug-related offenses. In order to protect our communities, we need to bring awareness to the millions of addicts who go untreated every year," said Kletter. "That is why we urge the governor and legislature to preserve funding for this critical treatment."

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 legislative budget committees in both houses. 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 patients, families, hospitals and public safety. A coalition of organizations released a letter to the governor and the legislature stating that 28,000, or 80 percent of the 35,000 patients in the drug treatment program, would relapse to drug use within a year,

COMP news release, September 1, 2010, page 2

increasing costs to the state by \$700 million to \$1 billion in drug-related public safety, criminal justice, emergency room and foster care costs.

“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 COMP President Kletter. “We anticipate a complete dismantling of the network of 142 statewide clinics that provide methadone treatment to approximately 35,000 patients.”

Destroying the clinic network that developed over 30 years 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.

The following organizations urge the preservation of the Drug Medi-Cal Program:

California Opioid Maintenance Providers (COMP)
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 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
California Association of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselors
White House Office of National Drug Control Policy

For more information, please visit www.savemedi-caldrugtreatment.org

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