

NEWS RELEASE



DHCS AWARDS \$17 MILLION TO EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS TO INCREASE PATIENT ACCESS TO CARE

Grants Will Fund Behavioral Health Navigators to Serve as Patient Intermediaries

SACRAMENTO — The Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) today awarded more than \$17 million to 142 hospitals with emergency departments (EDs), each receiving up to \$120,000 to train behavioral health navigators to help expand access to substance use disorder and mental health services. The awards were part of Round 2 of the [CalBridge Behavioral Health Navigator Program](#), a DHCS project through a contract with the Public Health Institute. To date, 232 hospitals have received funding under CalBridge.

“Californians in great numbers are experiencing substance use disorders and mental health conditions, posing a significant challenge for our communities, hospitals, and clinics. Having health navigators in every emergency department, and training them to help patients in need, will positively impact many lives,” said DHCS Director Michelle Baass. “Providing patients with enhanced access to treatment, referrals, and follow-up care is the right thing to do for our Medi-Cal members, and all Californians.”

California general acute care hospitals with EDs (comprehensive, basic, or standby) that receive the funding can:

- Establish and train behavioral health navigators to increase patient access to care.
- Identify, screen, and interview patients with substance use disorder and co-occurring mental health conditions and link them to appropriate treatment.
- Implement consistent delivery of medication-assisted treatment.
- Adopt new models for reaching historically disadvantaged populations.
- Build an environment that welcomes disclosure of substance use and provides rapid evidence-based treatment.

These awards are part of a concerted effort by the California Health & Human Services Agency (CalHHS) to strengthen California’s health care workforce. “We are working to ensure that people with substance use disorders receive 24/7 high-quality care in every California health system, with addiction treatment that is fully integrated into standard practice,” said CalHHS Secretary Dr. Mark Ghaly. “California is investing more than \$1.4 billion to expand the health and human services workforce to include newer professions like behavioral health navigators that break down barriers to accessing treatment and help save lives.

In related news, the Department of Health Care Access and Information recently [announced](#) \$40.8 million in grant awards to 20 organizations that support and encourage students from underrepresented regions and backgrounds to pursue health care careers.

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CalBridge supports all participating hospitals with access to materials, training, and technical assistance for navigators, clinicians, nurses, community health workers, and other hospital staff and stakeholders.

CalBridge is funded by the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 under key initiatives for [Medi-Cal's Home and Community-Based Services](#). By increasing the number of behavioral health navigators in EDs, people with a substance use disorder or opioid use disorder, or who are experiencing a mental health crisis, will have access to appropriate care to address their needs.

CalBridge also aims to train and expand the ED workforce to address the urgent need for behavioral health patient care. Drug overdose deaths more than doubled in California from [2017 to 2021](#), and recent studies show individuals that recovered from COVID-19 are nearly 35 percent more likely to develop an opioid use disorder and 20 percent more likely to develop substance use [disorders](#). Addiction and mental illnesses sometimes result in life-or-death emergencies, so it is imperative that EDs provide evidence-based treatment in all communities.

Applications for CalBridge Round 3 funding are now being accepted, with applications due on December 15, 2022. More information is available at [CalBridge Behavioral Health Navigator Program](#).

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