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DHCS TACKLES OPIOID CRISIS BY EXPANDING ACCESS TO TREATMENT

SACRAMENTO – Nearly 22,000 Californians started treatment for opioid addiction over the past two years through the Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) Expansion Project, a multi-pronged effort by the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS).

The project's goal is to increase access to treatment for opioid use disorder and reduce opioid overdose deaths. The Department recently announced outcomes from the federally funded project.

“California recognizes the complexity and challenges of treating individuals with substance use disorders,” said California Health and Human Services Secretary Dr. Mark Ghaly. “This program ensures that proven and effective treatment is available across the state.”

“These results demonstrate how the Medication Assisted Treatment Expansion Project is increasing access to treatment for people with substance use disorders,” said DHCS Acting Director Richard Figueroa. “Expanding access to Medication Assisted Treatment gives Californians more ways and more places to get the life-saving treatment they need, no matter where they seek it.”

MAT is the use of FDA-approved medication to relieve withdrawal symptoms and psychological cravings for opioids. When used in combination with counseling and behavioral therapies, it provides a “whole person” approach to substance use disorders.

The MAT Expansion Project is funded by grants totaling \$265 million from the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Over the course of two years, the project has:

- Provided treatment to 21,800 new patients in communities across California.
- Reversed more than 8,000 overdoses with naloxone, the opioid overdose reversal medication.
- Expanded access to treatment in jails and drug courts in 29 counties and provided MAT to 1,646 individuals in those settings.

- Created 650 new locations where patients can receive treatment for opioid use disorder.
- Trained 395 new providers to prescribe medications to treat opioid use disorder.
- Established centers for stabilization and referral to treatment for opioid use disorder in 52 hospitals and emergency rooms.
- Established 58 primary care clinics as sites for the ongoing treatment of patients with substance use disorder
- Expanded access to treatment in 10 counties for pregnant and parenting women with substance use disorder

Project highlights:

- **Hub & Spoke System:** Aims to increase access to MAT services throughout the state, particularly in counties with the highest overdose rates. Narcotic treatment programs serve as “hubs”—experts in treating opioid use disorder—and work with office-based treatment settings, referred to as “spokes,” to provide ongoing care and maintenance treatment. The Hub & Spoke System has led to:
 - 395 new practitioners trained to prescribe MAT in spokes, doubling the number of prescribers since the first month of the program
 - 21,800 new patients starting methadone, buprenorphine, or extended-release naltrexone, the three FDA-approved medications for treating opioid use disorder
- **California Bridge:** Develops hospitals and emergency departments into primary access points for the treatment of acute symptoms of substance use disorder. Participating sites address substance use as a treatable chronic illness, treating individuals with and using harm reduction techniques, such as naloxone distribution, to minimize the risks associated with substance use disorder. To date, 52 health care facilities are participating in 35 counties
- **MAT in Criminal Justice:** A technical assistance program for 29 counties that are developing or expanding MAT to individuals in county jails and through drug courts. An estimated 65 percent of individuals in the criminal justice system meet the criteria for a substance use disorder. To date, 1,646 individuals have received treatment for opioid use disorder. More than 500 justice system professionals, such as judges and corrections officers, have received training on opioid addiction and how to provide treatment to individuals under their supervision.
- **Naloxone Distribution Project:** Aims to reduce opioid overdose deaths by providing free naloxone, a medication used to reverse an opioid overdose. More than 250,000 units of naloxone have been distributed to nearly 800 organizations in 55 of California’s 58 counties. More than 8,000 opioid overdose reversals have been reported through the project.
- **Tribal MAT Project:** Addresses the culturally unique needs of American Indian/Alaska Native populations, which have more than three times the death rate from opioids compared to the California average. Providers have been trained in treating opioid use disorder, risk reduction/overdose prevention, safe

usage of opioids, managing pain, treating pregnant women with opioid use disorder, and traditional healing practices and cultural humility.

- Perinatal and Primary Care Projects: 58 primary care clinics and maternity care providers in 10 counties are incorporating MAT into their practices

In 2018, 2,428 Californians died due to an opioid overdose. While the state's overdose death rate, 5.8 per 100,000 people, is below the national average of 14.9 per 100,000, overdose rates in some rural counties exceed the national average. For example, Humboldt County's overdose rate in 2017 rivaled states such as Vermont and Tennessee, at 21 overdose deaths per 100,000 people. By the end of the second year of the MAT Expansion Project, Humboldt's overdose rate dropped by almost 50 percent in 2018, to 11.2 per 100,000 people.

In 2018, early data shows methamphetamine death rates equal opioids for the first time. While medications for methamphetamine use disorder are not yet available, the MAT Expansion Project is working to ensure all health care and criminal justice systems are prepared to screen for and treat all substance use disorders, not just opioids.

The project also includes media campaigns, engagement of opioid safety coalitions, drug take-back efforts, and supportive housing. A full [report](#) on the activities, accomplishments, and challenges of the projects funded by the federal grants is on the DHCS website.

Visit www.CaliforniaMAT.org, for more information on the project. The [Impact of the MAT Expansion Project flyer](#) provides a summary of the project's impacts and [DHCS Approach to the Opioid Crisis](#) describes the projects and outcomes.

If you or someone you know is struggling with substance use, find help at www.ChooseMAT.org.

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