

## Communication from Public

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**Council File No:** 23-0670-S2  
**Comments for Public Posting:** Coalition letter in support of opioid settlement funds for harm reduction services in the City of Los Angeles.



March 19, 2024

Councilmember Eunisses Hernandez, Chair  
Councilmember John Lee  
Councilmember Heather Hutt  
Neighborhood and Community Enrichment Committee  
200 N Spring St, Los Angeles, CA 90012

**Re: Allocation of opioid settlement funds to supplement evidence-based harm reduction approaches to treat substance use in the City of Los Angeles.**

Dear Los Angeles City Council Members,

We, the undersigned organizations, write this letter to respectfully request that the city's opioid settlement funds be prioritized for evidence-based harm reduction approaches to strengthen the city's response in addressing the ongoing overdose crisis, primarily in underserved areas substantially affected by overdose fatalities.

The financial resources stemming from settlements holding the pharmaceutical companies accountable for their problematic business practice in fueling an unprecedented overdose crisis, provides the City of Los Angeles with the opportunity to fund proven solutions to address the needs of people with substance use. For this to happen, Los Angeles must follow the evidence to guide the spending. We would like to express our support for the following recommendations:

1. **Expansion of Syringe Service Programs (SSPs):** As delineated by the [California Department of Health Care Services](#), SSPs must be a core strategy for opioid settlement funds. These programs have proven effective in preventing the transmission of diseases such as HIV, hepatitis B & C, supporting linkages to care and improving public safety.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2019). Syringe Services Programs (SSPs). Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/ssp/syringe-services-programs-factsheet.html>

SSP participants are also three times more likely to stop using<sup>2</sup> and five times more likely to enter treatment.<sup>3</sup> With additional funding, SSPs will have the capacity to increase services via staffing, secure a location to provide services,<sup>4</sup> or by acquiring and purchasing supplies and increasing access to naloxone within hard-to-reach populations. The distribution of funds will also need to be concentrated in areas where the needs are the highest, for instance, in City Council Districts that have a high incidence of overdoses.

2. **Allocate Funding for MacArthur Park Harm Reduction Center:** We thank this committee for approving the Motion (Hernandez-Yaroslavsky) to transfer funds from the Opioid Settlement Funds to a Council District 1 MacArthur Park Harm Reduction Center. This center has the potential to provide a spectrum of health and support services in MacArthur Park for people who use drugs with access to harm reduction supplies. By bringing a broad range of services together in one place, the city will reduce barriers to healthcare and support that people who use drugs encounter due to language barriers, stigma, racism, discrimination and/or immigration status. We ask that the Budget, Finance and Innovation Committee follows through and approves this motion.
3. **Invest in Drug Checking Services:** Expand drug checking services<sup>5</sup> beyond the availability of fentanyl testing strips. This is an evidence-based strategy to reduce the risks of harm from using drugs obtained in the unregulated market. Drug checking technology offers accurate and timely information about local drug supplies, and equips consumers with education and resources to use more safely.<sup>6</sup>
4. **Fund SSPs Overdose Prevention Centers:** Los Angeles County currently has several SSPs which are evidence based and daily at the forefront of addressing the opioid epidemic. As trusted and experienced leaders in the community, if funded LA county SSPs would be able to make a significant impact in preventing overdose deaths, provide wrap-around services including medical care, linkage to housing and voluntary treatment options in a safe stigma-free environment.

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<sup>2</sup> Hagan H, McGough JP, Thiede H, Hopkins S, Duchin J, Alexander ER. Reduced injection frequency and increased entry and retention in drug treatment associated with needle-exchange participation in Seattle drug injectors. *J Subst Abuse Treat.* 2000;19(3):247–252.

<sup>3</sup> Strathdee SA, Celentano DD, Shah N, et al. Needle-exchange attendance and health care utilization promote entry into detoxification. *J Urban Health.* 1999;76(4):448-460.

<sup>4</sup> The city should explore avenues to provide incentive programs for landlords in order to protect syringe service programs from discrimination when they are renting a space to operate.

<sup>5</sup> Drug checking services analyze drug samples and provide information to people who use drugs about the content of the drugs they are taking using technology such as mass spectrometers.

<sup>6</sup> McDonald K, Thompson H, Werb D. 10 key findings related to the impact of Toronto's Drug Checking Service. Toronto: Centre on Drug Policy Evaluation. May 31, 2023. Retrieved from [https://drugchecking.community/wp-content/uploads/dlm\\_uploads/2023/05/TDCS-key-findings-related-to-impact-v3.pdf](https://drugchecking.community/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/2023/05/TDCS-key-findings-related-to-impact-v3.pdf)

5. **Support Voluntary Wrap-Around Services:** To confront this crisis, the city must fund other interventions such as a full range of **voluntary** treatment services, a community education campaign to inform Angelenos with fact-based information about drugs and safer drug use, warm hand-offs to recovery, jobs, housing, food, child care, legal support, family reunification assistance, as well as building and supporting the work force in the field of substance use treatment, and more importantly expand current harm reduction models to offer overdose prevention services on-site.

One thing is clear; drug related overdoses are preventable and harm reduction approaches that meet people where they are, free of stigma and discrimination are vital in any effort to address this public health crisis. In order for these types of programs to respond to the high needs of individuals struggling with drug use, a serious continued investment is needed to ensure those on the front lines of the current housing and overdose crisis have the resources needed to meet the needs of individuals on the ground.

Syringe services programs, a MacArthur Park harm reduction center, drug checking services and overdose prevention programs are needed now more than ever in Los Angeles. The updated report on Fentanyl Overdoses in Los Angeles demonstrates that fentanyl overdose deaths increased for all race/ethnicities over the span of seven years (2016-2022) and when accounting for different population sizes, “from 2018-2022 the fentanyl overdose death rates increased by 1,559% among Blacks and increased by 1,002% among Latinos.”<sup>7</sup> This represents a disproportionate impact on people of color and demonstrates the urgency to invest resources within the reach of these communities.

Drug overdoses are an ongoing public health crisis and for the reasons stated in this letter, we respectfully request that the City of Los Angeles prioritize funding for harm reduction programming through the use of opioid settlement funds. The City of Los Angeles must lead and be an example to the rest of the country on how the funds must be utilized to effectively reduce overdose deaths and increase connections to life affirming services.

Thank you for the consideration and attention to this request. For questions about our position, please refer them to [california@drugpolicy.org](mailto:california@drugpolicy.org)

Respectfully,

Being Alive-LA

Homeless Health Care Los Angeles

The Sidewalk Project

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<sup>7</sup> Substance Abuse Prevention and Control, Los Angeles County Department of Public Health. (2023, November). *Data report: Fentanyl overdoses in Los Angeles County*. Retrieved from <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/sapc/MDU/SpecialReport/FentanylOverdosesInLosAngelesCounty.pdf?v1.17.23>

Community Health Project LA

HealthRIGHT 360

Common Ground/Venice Family Clinic

Harm Reduction Institute

The Gubbio Project

Practical Strategies LLC

Drug Policy Alliance

National Harm Reduction Coalition

Inland Empire Harm Reduction

CASEP - California Syringe Exchange Program Coalition