

California Syringe Services 2016 – 2024: The Impact of Investing in Harm Reduction & the Effect of a Global Pandemic

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Clearinghouse launched with \$3 million in funding.
Total # of SSPs in CA: 41
July 2016

October 2018
Naloxone Distribution Project (NDP) starts.
Total # of SSPs in CA: 44

Smoking supplies added to Clearinghouse.
Total # of SSPs in CA: 62
January 2020

March 2020
COVID-19 is declared a pandemic.

\$12.2 million in CHRI funding for **37 programs**.
August 2020

November 2021
\$3 million in additional Clearinghouse funding, \$6 million in total.

Mini grants begin.
Total # of SSPs in CA: 66
January 2022

March 2024
Wave #1 of COPHRI, \$21 million in funding for 35 awardees.

Wave #2 of COPHRI, \$11.4 million in funding for 20 new awardees.
Total # of SSPs in CA: 86
July 2024



Background

Although we call it the Clearinghouse Survey, it is not an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Harm Reduction Supply Clearinghouse. Instead, it's a survey of all programs participating in the Clearinghouse to assess the relative stability and growth of harm reduction programs in California, and to learn what challenges and successes syringe services programs (SSPs) are experiencing.

In 2016, when the Clearinghouse began, the main goal was to bring supply stability to SSPs. Even though the Clearinghouse is a shared resource, and not designed to achieve 100% supply coverage, it brought stability to programs so they could divert supply funding to other areas, which in turn stabilized many programs that were struggling.

Due to the efforts of harm reduction advocates, the Clearinghouse has grown steadily in both funding and number of programs participating. In turn, the Harm Reduction Unit's focus has moved to support and sustain the growth of all programs to continue the life-saving work they have been doing.

Methods

California SSPs complete the Clearinghouse application as part of the yearly reporting requirements.

- Thirty-five approved SSPs operating in California at the time of the funding announcement completed the program application survey in 2016, providing a baseline for supplies and services provided before the Clearinghouse funding was available.
- Eighty-one SSPs completed the renewal application in 2025.
- Surveys were administered through Qualtrics, and responses were exported to Excel for analysis.

Smoking vs. Injecting Trends

As it became clear that more people who inject drugs were shifting to smoking drugs, the OA Harm Reduction Unit surveyed programs in 2021 to learn how many were providing smoking and snorting supplies to their program participants. We reviewed the research and developed a policy brief and Dear Colleague letter to inform public health practitioners and SSPs of the value of providing supplies for other means of consumption.

- 69 SSPs (85%) now order smoking supplies, compared to 43 (74%) in 2021.**
- The quantity of safer smoking supplies increased 779.3% from 89,424 supplies in 2021, to 786,304 supplies in 2024. The quantity of syringes purchased only increased 16.1% (**Table 1**).
- Between 2016 and 2024, syringe distribution by SSPs decreased by 56%; during the same timeframe, syringe collection decreased by 63.5%.

TABLE 1: Comparison of the Quantity of Safer Smoking Supplies and Syringes Purchased in 2021 and 2024

	2021 N=58	2024 N=81	% Increase
Safer Smoking Supplies	89,424	786,304	779.3%
Syringes	11,003,000	12,774,610	16.1%

"Through the grant we were able to free up some of our other funding for materials where we were able to hire additional staff through the savings from the grant."
– SSP Programs Manager

Impact of COVID-19

- In 2020, SSPs provided services to 97,252 people, a 49.9% decrease from 2019 where 194,414 people were served (**Figure 1**).
- While SSPs saw a decrease in the number of participants served, syringe distribution did increase. **In 2020 SSPs distributed 25,802,702 in 2020, an 8.8% increase from the 23,700,592 syringes distributed in 2019 (Figure 2).**

FIGURE 1: Number of Unique Individuals Served by California SSPs in 2019 & 2020

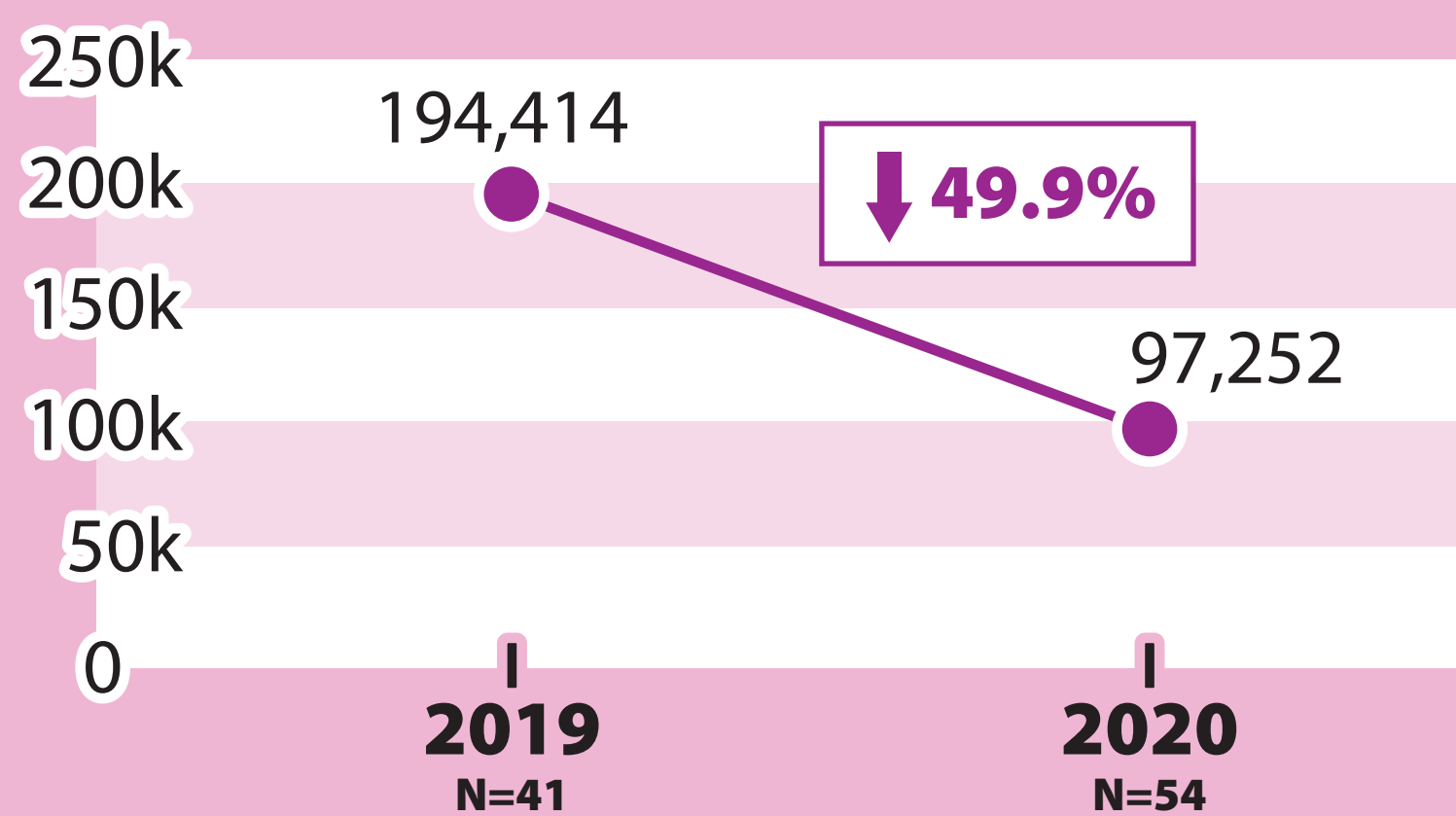
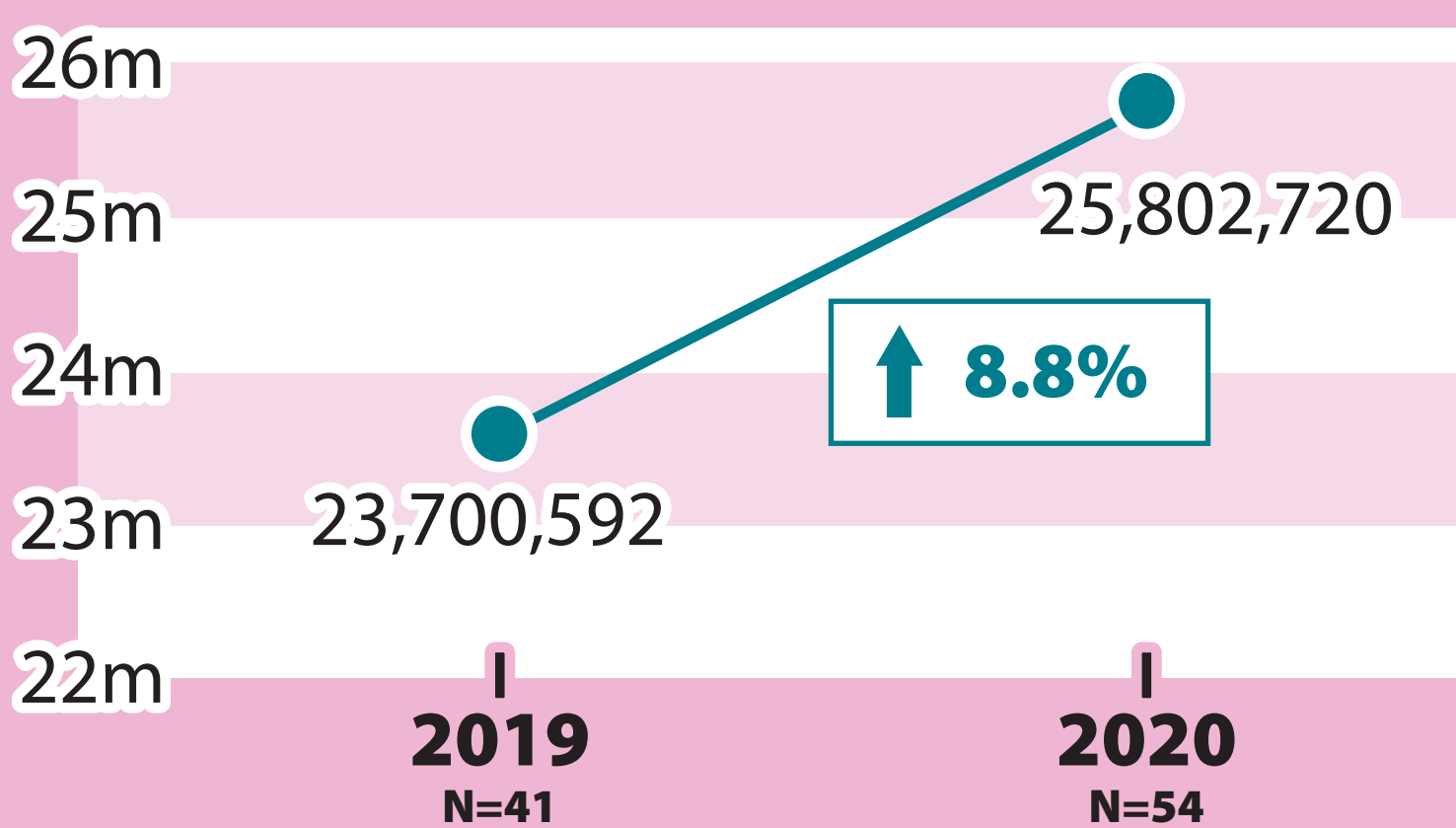


FIGURE 2: Number of Syringes Distributed by California SSPs in 2019 & 2020



Naloxone

- Naloxone was added to the Clearinghouse supply list in 2016. In 2016, 30 of the 37 SSPs (81%) that completed the survey reported they were providing naloxone. **In 2018, the Clearinghouse was able to remove naloxone from the Clearinghouse due to the start of DHCS' Naloxone Distribution Project that provided first responders with free naloxone.** By 2024, all SSPs respondents (100%) were providing naloxone or partnering with an organization that distributes naloxone.
- During COVID-19 increases were also seen in naloxone distribution and overdose reversals. In 2020, SSPs distributed 185,410 doses of naloxone, compared to 104,306 in 2019 (77.7% increase) (**Figure 3**).
- Overdose reversals increased 76.2%, from 12,518 in 2019 to 22,055 in 2020.**
- Sixty-two SSPs reported tracking overdose reversals; in 2024 50,390 overdose reversals were reported and 1,036,162 doses of naloxone were distributed (Table 2).**

FIGURE 3: Number of Naloxone Doses Distributed by CA SSPs in 2019 & 2020

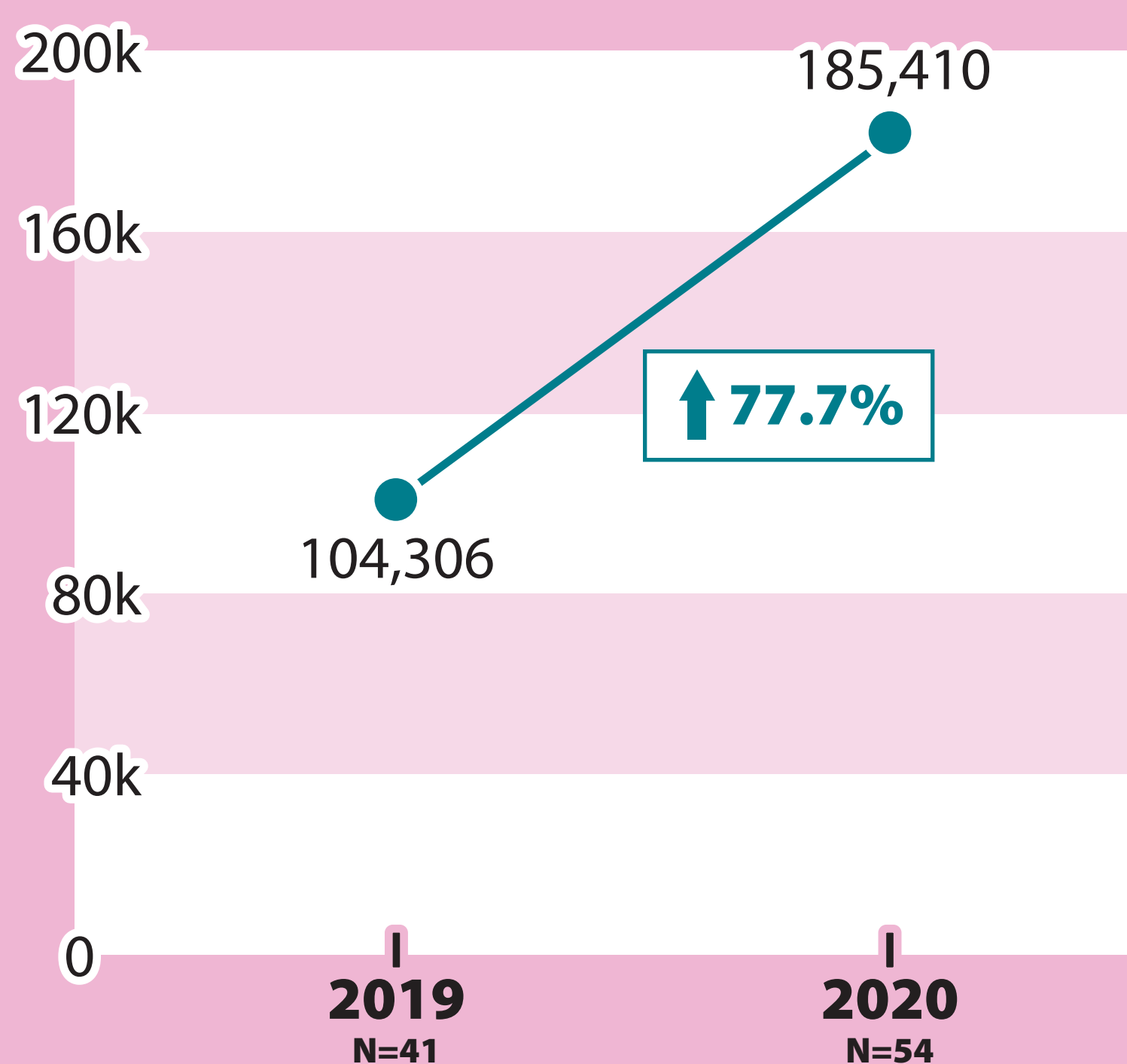


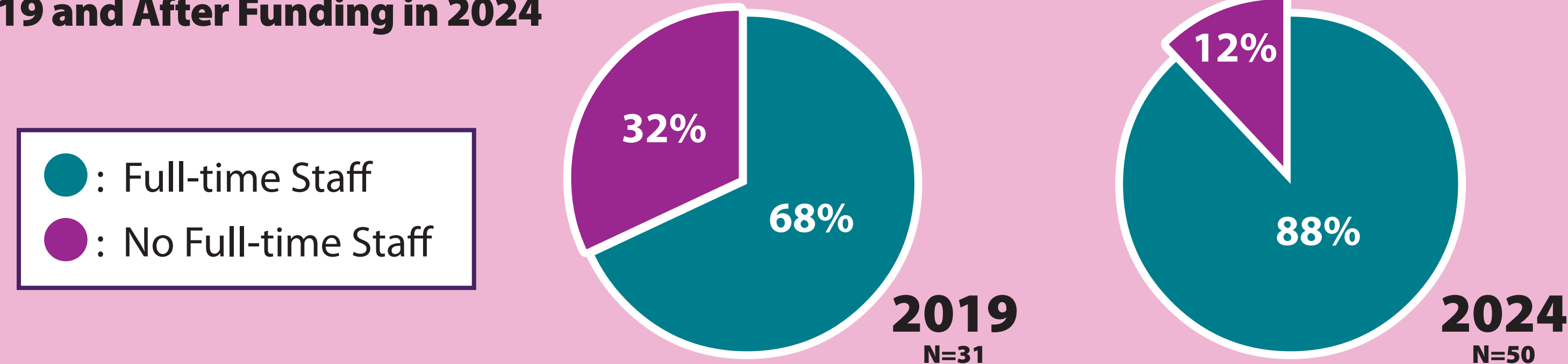
TABLE 2: Number of Naloxone Doses Distributed & Overdose Reversals Reported by CA SSPs in 2018 and 2024

	2018 N=38	2024 N=81	% Increase
# of Naloxone Doses Distributed	51,149	1,036,162	1,925.7%
# of Overdose Reversals	10,528	50,390	378.6%

Impact of CHRI Funding

- In August of 2020, the California Harm Reduction Initiative (CHRI) funded 37 Syringe Services Programs across 21 counties to expand the range, reach and quality of harm reduction services in state. The project is funded by the California Department of Public Health, Office of AIDS.
- In 2019, prior to receiving funding, 68% of the SSPs reported having full-time staff. The programs were operating on average, 25.4 hours a week and had an average budget of \$338,078.
- By 2024, most of the programs reported having full-time staff (88%) (Figure 4), operating on average 43 hours a week (69.3% increase) (Figure 5) and had an average budget of \$616,257 (82.3% increase).**

FIGURE 4: Comparison of CHRI Awardees with Full-time Staff Before CHRI Funding in 2019 and After Funding in 2024



- However, there is still a need for improvement as programs report continued staffing challenges. **In 2024, the top three staffing challenges that programs reported were staff burnout (60%), insufficient number of staff (58%) and staff in need of training (56%) (Table 3).**

FIGURE 5: Average Number of Hours Open for Operation per Week by CHRI Awarded SSPs in 2019 and 2024

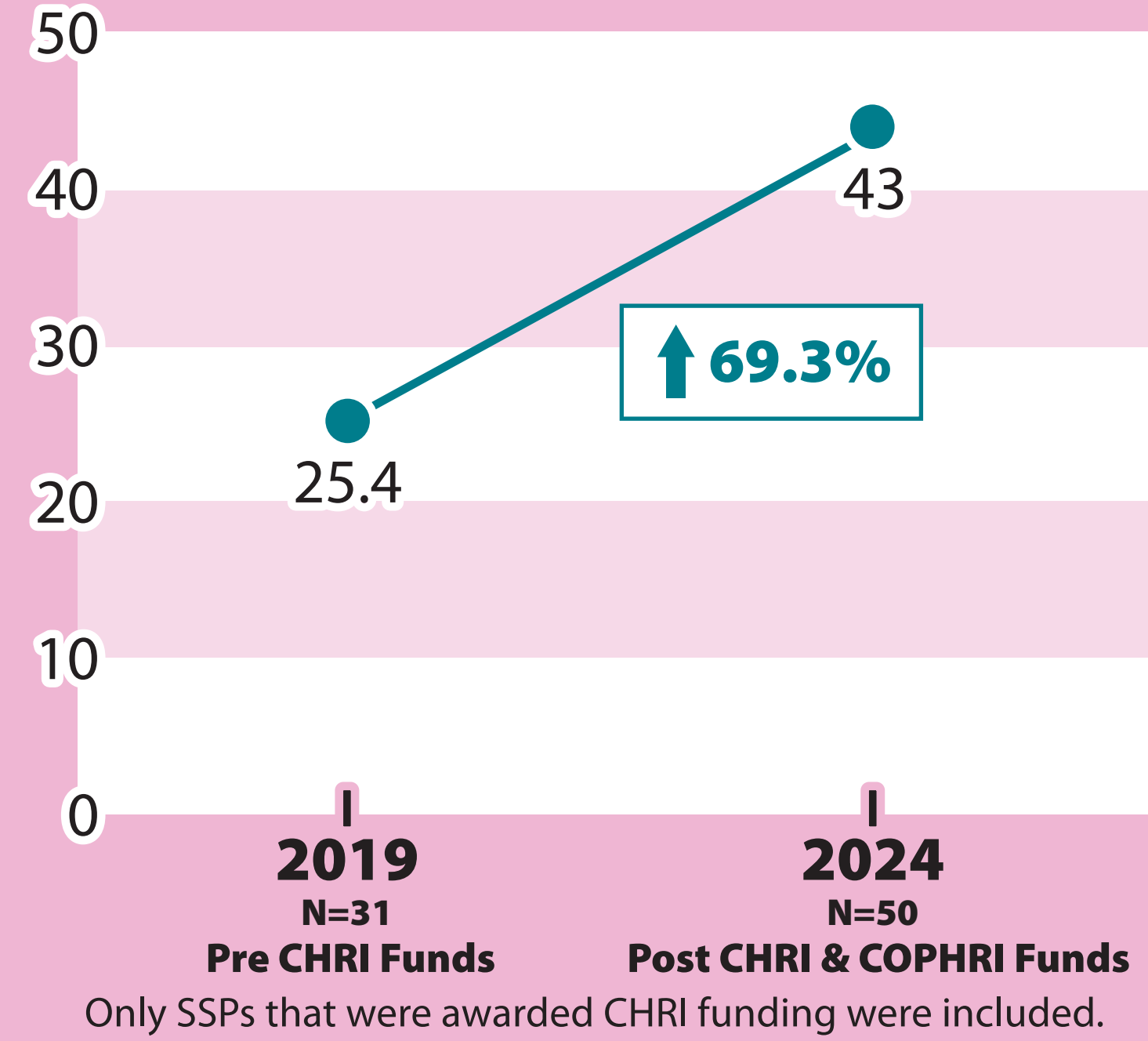


TABLE 3: Top Three Reported Staffing Challenges Reported by CHRI Awarded SSPs in 2024

	# Number	% Percent
Staff Burnout	30	60%
Insufficient Number of Staff	29	58%
Staff in Need of Training	28	56%

N=50; Only SSPs that were awarded CHRI funding were included.

Future

Since the **number of SSPs in California has increased more than 225% since 2015** (in 2025 we have 91 programs in the Clearinghouse), we again were looking at reducing awards and eliminating the supplemental catalog. That was until the Ending the Epidemics advocates lobbied for ADAP rebate funds to be used for HIV interventions. So, the Clearinghouse will receive \$10M a year until June 2027.

It is unclear if this funding will be extended beyond 2027, so we are making contingency plans. For example, providing higher allocations so that SSPs can stock up and storage unit grants so SSPs can stock up for when or if funding is reduced.

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