

December 21, 2009

TO: Office of AIDS Prevention Branch Contractors and California Syringe Exchange Programs

FROM: Alessandra Ross, Injection Drug Use Specialist, California Department of Public Health, Office of AIDS

SUBJECT: Lifting of the Ban on the Use of Federal Funds for Syringe Exchange

Dear Colleagues,

Last Wednesday, December 16, President Obama signed Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2010, which lifts the 1989 ban on the use of federal funds for syringe exchange programs (SEPs). According to Dr. Jonathan Mermin, Director of the Division of HIV/AIDS Prevention (DHAP) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC),

“This is an historic action in the fight against HIV/AIDS, one that has the potential to reduce HIV infections among people who inject drugs.”

The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) considers syringe exchange to be unquestionably vital in the struggle to reduce the spread of HIV, HCV and other blood-borne infections among injection drug users, their partners, and their children. Over the past four years, CDPH has awarded over 3.5 million dollars in State General Funds to authorized syringe exchange programs across the state to provide syringe exchange, HIV and HCV testing, counseling and referral to needed services.

Recent cuts in State General Funds for HIV prevention have resulted in elimination of all state funding of SEPs: HIV prevention in the state is now solely funded by federal dollars, which had precluded the funding of SEPs.

The lifting of the ban will mean that CDC funds for FY 2010/11 and future fiscal year funds can be used to support SEPs when they are awarded. DHAP is developing policy guidance for grantees around the use of federal funds for SEPs; when the guidance is provided to CDPH/OA, we will provide the information to our grantees in order to allow local health jurisdictions the flexibility to use these funds to support syringe exchange programs where they are authorized.

Attached you will find a list of the funded local health jurisdictions, ranked by proportion of HIV/AIDS cases attributable to injection drug use. More information will be forwarded as we receive it; in the meantime please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

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