



NATHAN FLETCHER

**SUPERVISOR, FOURTH DISTRICT
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: January 26, 2021

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

**FRAMEWORK FOR THE FUTURE: SAVING LIVES AND IMPROVING HEALTH
OUTCOMES THROUGH COMPREHENSIVE HARM REDUCTION APPROACH
(DISTRICTS: ALL)**

OVERVIEW

One of the most challenging illnesses facing our society is chronic substance use disorder (SUD). People Who Inject Drugs (PWID) are a subset of substance users that are the most marginalized and have poor health. This is due to the high risk of overdosing due to isolation and contracting blood-borne viruses such as Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) through sharing needles.

If we are going to overcome this public health crisis, achieve local goals the County has set to end the HIV and HCV epidemics and save lives, we must implement best practices and include all tools in our County toolbox.

The Health and Human Services Agency submitted a memo to the Board on January 14, 2021, with findings based on an environmental assessment in San Diego of PWID and recommendations rooted in academic research led by San Diego State University Institute of Public Health (SDSU-IPH) and Family Health Centers of San Diego. The memo clearly demonstrate that injection drug use of both opioids and other substances is a serious growing problem in San Diego County, and that there is an urgent need for evidence-based interventions, including Syringe Services Programs (SSP) and other harm reduction strategies to be expanded and barriers to care removed.

Today, I am recommending that our Board direct the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to establish an action plan to realize a Syringe Services Program to meet current needs as well as a comprehensive County Substance Use Harm Reduction Strategy that broadens the existing "Opioid and Prescription Drug Misuse" strategy to bring a harm reduction approach to all substance use interventions across the County with the aim of saving lives and improving health outcomes.

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**RECOMMENDATION(S)
CHAIR NATHAN FLETCHER**

- 1.) Find that any prior Board direction opposing harm reduction programs, including the December 9, 1997 resolution entitled “Resolution to Oppose Needle Exchange Programs” (No. 97-381) shall no longer be in effect.
- 2.) Direct the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to create an Action Plan to realize a Syringe Services Program to meet the needs of San Diego County’s population, including identification of necessary resources, and program partnerships in accordance with findings and recommendations in the January 14, 2021, HHS memo and accompanied SDSU- IPH study, *Environmental Assessment on People Who Inject Drugs*, and report back to the Board with regular updates.
- 3.) Direct the CAO to return within 90 days to the Board with a comprehensive County Substance Use Harm Reduction Strategy including immediate, intermediate and long-term actions that broadens the existing “Opioid and Prescription Drug Misuse” strategy to bring a harm reduction approach to all substance use interventions across the County.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with this board action.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

At the January 7, 2021, Behavioral Health Advisory Board (BHAB) meeting, the Director of Behavioral Health Services presented on the work to date of an Ad Hoc Committee created by the Board to conduct a needs assessment to establish a Syringe Services Program (SSP). The BHAB members expressed support in concept of the findings, recommendations and moving forward with integrating harm reduction strategies, including SSP, into the County’s continuum of services.

BACKGROUND

One of the most challenging illnesses facing our society is chronic substance use disorder (SUD). This ailment often leads to poor health, premature and accidental death, unemployment, homelessness, and shattered lives of individual users and their families. Access to services to treat individuals with SUD is sparse compared to other behavioral health and physical health disorders. People Who Inject Drugs (PWID) are a subset of substance users that are the most marginalized and have poor health. This is due to the high risk of overdosing due to isolation and contracting blood-borne viruses such as Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Hepatitis C Virus (HCV).

In an effort to overcome this public health crisis and gain momentum in our County initiatives to end the HIV and HCV epidemics, I brought a proposal forward on March 10, 2020, to enable

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REDUCTION APPROACH (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

County Health and Human Services Agency to pursue Syringe Services Programs (SSP) and seek state and federal funding to support implementation. The action included updating the Board's position opposing SSP as documented in the 1997 Board Resolution.

At the time, the Board postponed the proposal (including opposing the 1997 Board Resolution) and opted to create an Ad Hoc Committee made up of county staff, professionals and stakeholders to conduct a needs assessment and operational planning to establish an SSP and return to the Board for consideration.

In response, the Health and Human Services Agency submitted a memo to the Board on January 14, 2021, with findings based on needs assessment and recommendations rooted in academic research led by San Diego State University Institute of Public Health (SDSU-IPH) and Family Health Centers of San Diego. The memo and its findings clearly demonstrate that injection drug use of both opioids and other substances is a serious growing problem in San Diego County, and that there is an urgent need for evidence-based interventions, including SSPs and other harm reduction strategies to be expanded and barriers to care removed. The Ad Hoc Committee recommends that in order for these new services to be successfully realized, the County should work to improve organizational planning, expand services and education, and reduce stigma from community and professionals.

Today, I am recommending that our Board direct the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to establish an action plan to realize a Syringe Services Program to meet current needs as well as a comprehensive County Substance Use Harm Reduction Strategy that broadens the existing "Opioid and Prescription Drug Misuse" strategy to bring a harm reduction approach to all substance use interventions across the County with the aim of saving lives and improving health outcomes in our community.

There are numerous strategies that could be included in this approach. Due to stigma attached to SUD, community attitudes and perceptions as well as government policies have created barriers for access to treatment and support services. These barriers include overly burdensome permitting processes to site services, criminalizing the act of using, and barring eligibility for support programs like federal housing vouchers that are needed to help individuals recover and repair their lives.

As illustrated in my previous board letter, citations in multiple studies and the findings from the Ad Hoc Committee, SSPs and other harm reduction strategies are a proven strategy with over 30 years of academic research demonstrating effectiveness in preventing infectious disease, providing a bridge to services and substance use treatment and overdoses without increasing injection of drugs.

We must rise to the challenge and allow our County health professionals to adopt SSPs and other harm reduction strategies as a tool to connect with substance users with services and treatment to help them recover and improve their circumstances. If we do not take prompt action to reverse our position and allow our public health and behavioral health department to provide these services in our region as a part of our continuum, we could see an increase in deadly infectious diseases,

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overdose deaths and more lives compromised. We cannot allow another life to be lost on our watch when we know services are within reach to help.

I urge your support for the actions in this board letter to 1.) find that any prior Board direction opposing harm reduction programs shall no longer be in effect, 2.) direct the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to create an Action Plan to realize a Syringe Services Program, and 3.) create a comprehensive County Substance Use Harm Reduction Strategy that broadens the existing “Opioid and Prescription Drug Misuse” strategy to bring a harm reduction approach to all substance use interventions across the County and report back to the board with progress and a final report.

This policy aligns with our [Framework for the Future of San Diego County](#). The Framework prioritizes communities and populations in San Diego that have been historically left behind. Through this Framework, we are fighting for: racial justice, health equity, economic opportunity, environmental protection, community-centered public safety, and fundamental changes to county operations.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today's proposed recommendation supports the Building Better Health and Living Safely initiatives in County of San Diego's 2021-2026 Strategic Plan.

Respectfully submitted



NATHAN FLETCHER
Chair, Fourth District

ATTACHMENT(S)

Attachment A: County Health and Human Services Agency Memo re: Report Back on Adopting Best Practices to Reduce Harm, Promote Recovery and Protect Public Health (January 14, 2021)

Attachment B: March 10, 2020 (3) Board Letter: Adopting Best Practices to Promote Recovery and Protect Public Health

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AGENDA ITEM INFORMATION SHEET

REQUIRES FOUR VOTES: Yes No

WRITTEN DISCLOSURE PER COUNTY CHARTER SECTION 1000.1 REQUIRED
 Yes No

PREVIOUS RELEVANT BOARD ACTIONS:

March 10, 2020 (3) Adopting Best Practices to Promote Recovery and Protect Public Health, December 09, 1997 (29), Needle Exchange Program

BOARD POLICIES APPLICABLE:

N/A

BOARD POLICY STATEMENTS:

N/A

MANDATORY COMPLIANCE:

N/A

ORACLE AWARD NUMBER(S) AND CONTRACT AND/OR REQUISITION NUMBER(S):

N/A

ORIGINATING DEPARTMENT: Supervisorial District Four

OTHER CONCURRENCE(S): N/A

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