



June 5, 2023

The Honorable Richard Roth
California State Senate
1021 O Street, Suite 3320
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Support – AB 663 (Haney) Pharmacy – Mobile Units

Dear Chairman Roth,

On behalf of the members of the California Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems and the millions of patients they serve, I am writing to voice our support for AB 663. This bill would authorize mobile pharmacies operated by local jurisdictions to dispense controlled substances used for the treatment of opioid use disorder, which would be securely stored and available based on prescription volume.

As you know, California's 21 public health care systems are the core of the state's health care safety net, delivering high-quality care to more than 3.7 million patients annually, regardless of ability to pay or insurance status. Public health care systems include both county-operated and -affiliated facilities, as well as the five University of California medical centers. Statewide, public health care systems employ 85,000 workers, provide nearly half of all hospital care to persons who are uninsured, and 40 percent of all hospital care to the Medi-Cal population in the communities they serve.

On any given day, over 150,000 people experience homelessness in California. People experiencing homelessness are disproportionately people of color, have poorer health, and have life expectancies 30-years shorter than the general population, in part due to barriers in accessing needed medical and behavioral health care. Mental health and substance use disorder are two of the most abundant health conditions impacting people experiencing homelessness. Within substance use disorders, opioid use disorder is a key driver of overdose death here in California. In 2021, statewide, nearly 7,000 people died due to opioid-related overdose.¹

SB 872, a bill passed last year, authorized local jurisdictions and hospital authorities to operate mobile pharmacies for purposes of providing prescription medication to unhoused and low-income individuals. This flexibility has supported public health care systems' efforts to provide street medicine and medication access in locations such as streets, parks, encampments, and sobering and navigation centers, and better serve people experiencing homelessness. Although the new law expanded access to medications, it did not authorize mobile pharmacies to dispense key medications for substance use disorders, such as buprenorphine.

The use of buprenorphine is a foundational part of opioid use disorder treatment and has repeatedly been shown to decrease all-cause mortality by 50 percent in individuals with opioid

¹ California Department of Public Health (CDPH). (2023). Fentanyl & Overdose Prevention. *CDPH*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/OPA/Pages/Communications-Toolkits/Fentanyl-Overdose-Prevention.aspx#:~:text=Based%20on%20preliminary%202021%20data,deaths%20were%20related%20to%20fentanyl.>

use disorder compared to treatment without medications.² Buprenorphine has also shown increased treatment retention and decreased opioid use. Treatment guidelines recommend that medications for the treatment of opioid use disorders be available to all patients. People that lack transportation or that face other barriers to obtaining medications from fixed pharmacy locations should have access to the same treatment options. By allowing mobile pharmacies to dispense medications like buprenorphine, high-risk populations, including people experiencing homelessness, can have access to these needed and often lifesaving medications.

For the reasons described above, we support AB 663. We would be pleased to further discuss our position with you and answer any questions you may have. Please contact Kelly Brooks-Lindsey, our Sacramento representative, at 916-753-0844 if you would like to follow-up. Thank you for your consideration and leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,



Erica B. Murray
President and CEO
California Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems

cc: The Honorable Matt Haney
The Honorable Members of the Senate Business, Professions, and Economic
Development Committee
Dana Shaker, Consultant, Senate Business, Professions, and Economic Development
Committee
Kayla Williams, Consultant, Senate Republican Caucus
Kelly Brooks-Lindsey, Hurst Brooks Espinosa

² National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine; Health and Medicine Division; Board on Health Sciences Policy; Committee on Medication-Assisted Treatment for Opioid Use Disorder. (2019). Medications for opioid use disorder save lives. *National Academies Press*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK541393/>