



September 19, 2023

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Request for Signature – AB 663 (Haney)

Dear Governor Newsom:

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 request your signature on 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.

California's 21 public health care systems, which include county-operated and affiliated facilities and the five University of California medical centers, 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 play an outsized role in caring for at-risk communities. Although they represent just six percent of all California hospitals, public health care systems provide 35% of all Medi-Cal and uninsured hospital care statewide. Public health care systems also provide a range of comprehensive services and train nearly half of all new doctors in hospitals across the state.

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.

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.>

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 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
Kelly Brooks-Lindsey, Hurst Brooks Espinosa
Sam Miller, Deputy Legislative Secretary, Office of Governor Gavin Newsom

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/>