

INDIAN HEALTH CENTER OF SANTA CLARA VALLEY

1333 Meridian Avenue, San Jose, CA 95125

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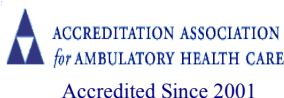
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FTCA Deemed

February 8, 2018

RE: Stakeholder Input to Address Opioid Crisis

Dear Senator Hatch,

On behalf of the Indian Health Center of Santa Clara Valley (IHCSCV), I submit our comments on how to improve the Medicare, Medicaid, and human service response to the opioid epidemic. IHCSCV is an Urban Indian Health Program (UIHP), and 330 Federally Qualified Health Center in San Jose, California, providing medical, dental, mental health, and community wellness services to its more than 24,000 clients throughout Santa Clara County, home to 26,000 American Indian and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs). Here, we are familiar with the opioid crisis – 1,925 Californians had opioid-linked overdose deaths in 2016 alone. To help address this crisis in our community, we participate in the Santa Clara County Opioid Overdose Prevention Project, but still face barriers in reducing the underlying causes of this epidemic.

We recognize access to physical therapy and chiropractic care as key components of non-opioid pain management. Even in California, where Medi-Cal tries to cover these services, clients still experience barriers to care. Serving Medicaid and Medicare clients requires physical therapist and chiropractic businesses to face overwhelming compliance requirements, thus reducing the number of access points for community members. These types of barriers should be assessed, and incentives to increase accessibility to non-pharmacological pain management therapies should be created.

Increasing access to nonopioid medications for chronic pain is also key to addressing this crisis. In particular, our physicians have noted that the use of topical pain management medications may help avoid the need to initiate opioid therapy, but these medications are often not on the formulary with the client's insurance, making them unaffordable and inaccessible. Additionally, incentivizing pain specialists to take Medicaid could help our clients access integrative approaches to managing pain, effective alternatives to opioids, and a way to break opioid addictions.

Many of our chronic pain clients need mental health care that is difficult to access. CDC guidelines have stated that the use of cognitive behavioral therapy is associated with lower median annual costs compared with opioid therapy. Increased funding for mental health for chronic pain populations is integral in addressing this crisis.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide our insight on this important issue. Please contact me if you have any follow-up questions or requests at (408) 445-3400 x337 or stetnowski@ihcscv.org.

Sincerely,

Sonya Tetnowski
Chief Executive Officer
Indian Health Center of Santa Clara Valley

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