



News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
NUMBER: 22-04
DATE: May 12, 2022

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DHCS INCREASES ITS INVESTMENT IN CALIFORNIA EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS TO ADDRESS OVERDOSE DEATHS, MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

SACRAMENTO — The CalBridge Behavioral Health Navigator Program (Bridge Navigator Program), a project of The Public Health Institute/CA Bridge under contract with the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS), is accepting applications for funding to place behavioral health navigators in emergency departments to expand access to substance use and mental health services. The application deadline is May 31, 2022.

With \$8.5 million in funding, the Bridge Navigator Program aims to expand the emergency department workforce to address the urgent need for behavioral health patient care. Drug overdose deaths more than doubled in California from 2017 to 2021, and mental health emergencies are rising. Addiction and mental illnesses often result in life or death emergencies, so it is imperative that emergency departments provide evidence-based treatment 24/7 in all communities.

“DHCS is committed to getting people the help they need for addiction and mental illness,” said DHCS Director Michelle Baass. “Helping to get patient navigators in every emergency department is going to positively change the outcomes of many lives.”

From 2020 to 2022, DHCS invested \$20 million, through State Opioid Response grant funding, to launch the Behavioral Health Pilot Project to place navigators in 206 hospital emergency departments, with the goal of expanding access to medication assisted treatment (MAT) for individuals presenting in the emergency department. To date, 95,000 patients have seen a navigator. Of these, 76,000 were identified as having an opioid use disorder, and 32,000 were treated with medication for opioid use disorder.

DHCS aims to implement the Bridge Navigator Program through enhanced federal funding to support initiatives that expand and strengthen Medi-Cal’s Home and Community-Based Services. This will increase the number of behavioral health navigators in emergency departments that currently participate in the CA Bridge program, and expand the program to new emergency departments across the state.

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Hospitals participating in the Bridge Navigator Program will address substance use disorder as a treatable medical emergency, using trained navigators to identify patients who would benefit from MAT or behavioral health services. CA Bridge will offer all participating hospitals access to materials, training, and technical assistance for navigators, clinicians, nurses, community health workers, and other hospital staff and stakeholders to implement this new standard of care throughout the state. Every emergency department in the state of California is eligible for funding.

“It is often said that it takes 17 years to go from research to standard practice in medicine, but people are dying, and we don’t have that long,” said Aimee Moulin, MD, Co-Founder of CA Bridge. “All communities deserve evidence-based medication for addiction and mental health treatment at their local hospital. [Hospitals should apply now.](#)”

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ABOUT THE CA BRIDGE PROGRAM

The CA Bridge Program, a program of the [Public Health Institute](#), is working to ensure that people with substance use disorders receive 24/7 high-quality care in every California health system by 2025. The program seeks to fully integrate addiction treatment into standard medical practice, breaking down barriers to accessible treatment and saving lives. More information is available at www.cabridge.org.