

CITY OF SAN DIEGO
M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: December 5, 2002

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council

FROM: Debra Fischle-Faulk, Community Services Deputy Director

SUBJECT: Clean Syringe Exchange Program Status Report

California State law AB136, which took effect January 1, 2000, decriminalizes needle exchange programs operated by public entities provided the City or County declares a local health emergency. On October 16, 2000 the San Diego City Council made such a declaration in response to the rapid spread of the Hepatitis C Virus (HVC) and the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) through the shared use of needles and syringes; the law requires the emergency to be continued every two weeks. The continuation is on the agenda of the December 9, 2002 Council Meeting (Item 130).

The number of reported HCV cases in San Diego increased by 50 percent between 1998 and 1999, and the rate of AIDS cases in the city is the third highest in the state, a condition exacerbated by the shared use of needles and syringes by injection drug users. These circumstances caused the San Diego City Council in October 2000 to appoint a Task Force to develop and implement a one-year Clean Syringe Exchange Pilot Program with a drug abuse treatment referral component to combat the issue of drug addiction. The Task Force began meeting in November 2000 and in June 2001, after extensive investigation and study of local conditions and of programs implemented in other cities facing a similar crisis, provided a final report to the Council.

On November 27, 2001, the City Council voted 5-4 to accept the recommendations of the Clean Syringe Task Force outlined in their final report dated June 12, 2001. The recommendations included: 1) Declaring a local health emergency in the City of San Diego; and 2) Authorizing a privately funded one-year pilot clean syringe exchange program as described in the report. Additional direction by the Council included: 3) The initial "prevention kits" include no more than two syringes; 4) The program is not implemented within three blocks of any school; 5) The process for determining the sites be done only with the concurrence of the Council member representing the District within which the site would be located; 6) Specific information be collected for the purposes of program evaluation; 7) The language on the proposed I. D. card be changed to state "This card has been issued to a participant in the City of San Diego's Clean Syringe Exchange Program", and 8) The program managers return to the PS&NS

Committee six months after implementation for an evaluation of the pilot sites and consideration of additional sites if warranted.

The City's Community and Economic Development Department has oversight responsibility for the clean Syringe Exchange Program (CSEP), which is privately funded by Alliance Healthcare Foundation and operated by a nonprofit organization.

Alliance Healthcare Foundation released a request for proposals for the pilot program in December 2001. In February 2002, a fourteen-member proposal review panel selected Family Health Centers of San Diego as the pilot program operator. Family Health Centers of San Diego is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide care to medically underserved individuals. A contract, between Alliance Healthcare Foundation and Family Health Centers of San Diego, containing all the elements detailed in the Clean Syringe Exchange Program Task Force Report adopted by the City Council, was signed in April 2002. The San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) Criminal Justice Research Division was selected as the local evaluator for the pilot program through a competitive process. The process included an interview with Alliance Healthcare Foundation and the contracted evaluator from Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health.

During the first several months, Family Health Centers of San Diego (FHCS D) recruited and hired appropriate staff and purchased program supplies, including harm reduction materials, hazardous waste handling supplies and a motor home from which program services are to be delivered. Working in conjunction with the program evaluation team of SANDAG and Johns Hopkins University, and the San Diego Police Department, written protocols for the delivery of all services in accordance with the Clean Syringe Exchange Program Task Force Report were created. Meetings with the San Diego Police Department continued to ensure the flow of timely and accurate information regarding program activities.

Early in May 2002, FHCS D's CEO and HIV Services Director, along with a consultant from the Monger Company, began working with local planning groups to complete the process for site identification in each of the three designated communities of Downtown, North Park and City Heights. The Downtown community was the first to complete this process, with the site (using a non-descript, mobile facility to deter loitering) becoming operational on July 18, 2002. Two more sites, one in City Heights and the other in North Park, are under consideration in cooperation with those communities.

FHCS D staff continues to work closely with the program evaluators to ensure accurate collection of data related to all aspects of service delivery. As of November 21, 2002, 146 unduplicated individuals have accessed the Downtown CSEP site. During 552 visits,

these clients have brought in 13,338 syringes in exchange for 9,425, resulting in an decrease of dirty syringes in the community. As a result of assisted referrals made to clients during CSEP activities, 31 clients have entered treatment or detoxification programs.

SANDAG staff has worked in collaboration with all program partners to develop research protocols to answer the primary research questions included in the Final Task Force Report (reduction in needle use and sharing, changes in drug use, access to drug treatment and other services, criminal activity, and client address). Efforts have included developing data collection instruments, the creation of an Access database to enable program staff to capture information at the program site, and meeting with SDPD staff to discuss crime data. The research protocol, as well as all data collection instruments (including the initial and follow-up research interviews being conducted with 225 program participants), have been reviewed and approved by an Independent Review Board (IRB).

SANDAG Research staff meet with program staff on a bi-monthly basis to discuss research issues and to ensure the quality of the data. As of November 15, 2002, 76 clients have completed the research initial interview; nine of these had completed the three-month follow-up interview. Research staff will begin intake interviews at the North Park and City Heights sites when they become operational. SDPD reports no significant incidents directly related to the CSEP Downtown site or its clients. Crime statistics are to be gathered over the life of the pilot program at all three sites.

The City Manager announced appointments to the Clean Syringe Exchange Program Facilitation Committee on October 7, 2002. Committee members are Daniel Bess representing the Greater North Park Planning Committee; Fran Butler-Cohen, CEO of Family Health Centers of San Diego; Dr. Cynthia Burke, SANDAG; Dr. James Dunford, Professor at UCSD and City EMS Medical Director; Debra Fischle-Faulk, Community Services Deputy Director; Michael Franz, McAlister Institute; Dr. Linda Lloyd, Alliance Healthcare Foundation; Dr. Wm. Christopher Mathews, UCSD School of Medicine and former chair of the Clean Syringe Exchange Task Force; Lt. Cesar Solis, SDPD; Jim Varnadore representing the City Heights Area Planning Committee; and Leslie Wade representing the East Village Association. Lisa Foster, Deputy City Attorney, serves as legal advisor to the committee.

Page 4
CSEP Status Report
December 5, 2002

The CSEP Facilitation Committee held its first meeting on October 15, 2002 and continues to meet monthly on the 1st Thursday of each month at noon. Dr. Jim Dunford was elected to chair the Committee and Jim Varnadore serves as Vice Chairman.

The City's new CSEP web page went live on the City's web site in July 2002. The web page provides an overview of the program, from the conditions that spurred its development to how it will be implemented. The CSEP Task Force Final Report is on the page and "fact", "frequently asked questions" and "testimonials" sections serve to educate the community and address issues and concerns. Links to relevant political documents and resources as well as to the partner organizations are also included. Most recently, a schedule of CSEP Facilitation Committee meetings, agendas and minutes have been posted to the web page so that interested citizens can access the current status of the program.

Please be assured that staff will be prepared to respond to all issues when this item comes before council for discussion on January 7, 2003. The status report was planned and prepared prior to the issues brought to Council during non-agenda comment on December 3, 2002.

Future reports will be prepared and submitted directly by the Program Facilitation Committee.

Council members and their staff may contact Community Services Special Projects Manager Staajabu Heshimu for additional information or to schedule a site visit to the service delivery mobile unit (619/236-6635 or Sheshimu@SanDiego.gov).

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DFF:bh

cc: Hank Cunningham, Community & Economic Development Department Director