



2010 Banner Year for Viral Hepatitis Prevention through Syringe Access

California Hepatitis Alliance (CalHEP), working under a grant from the [Tides Foundation](#), spent last year researching state policies regarding access to sterile syringes. CalHEP's policy consultant Glenn Backes has drafted model language for two bills to improve access to syringes in an effort to prevent the spread of viral hepatitis and other blood-borne diseases. CalHEP with key stakeholders in health advocacy and legislation cooperatively examined the drafts. **We are now very excited to report that the two bills have been introduced in the California legislature.**

[Senate Bill 1029](#) (SB 1029) authored by State Senator Leland Yee (D-San Francisco) would allow pharmacists statewide the discretion to sell up to 30 syringes to an adult without a prescription. Currently 14 counties and 4 cities participate in a pilot program that allows adults to purchase and possess ten or fewer syringes from a pharmacy. The statutes that authorized this pilot will expire the last day of this year, 2010. Senator Yee's bill will take the policy statewide, reducing cost and procedural barriers to implementation.

[Assembly Bill 1858](#) (AB 1858) authored by Assemblymember Bob Blumenfield (D-Van Nuys) would allow California Department of Public Health to authorize syringe exchange services in locations where the conditions exist for the rapid spread of viral hepatitis, HIV or other potentially deadly or disabling diseases.

Both SB 1029 and AB 1858 will allow an adult to possess 30 or fewer syringes from an authorized source, including a physician, pharmacist or syringe exchange program.

Another bill has been introduced, [Assembly Bill 1701](#) authored by Assemblymember Wes Chesbro (D-Ukiah) would sustain the current system of allowing adults to purchase and possess ten or fewer syringes from a pharmacy pursuant to a vote of local government. It would lift the December 31 sunset date but make no other changes in state law.

CalHEP recognizes these bills build upon recent recommendations at the National and State level. In January 2010, the Institute of Medicine recommended in the report, [Hepatitis and Liver Cancer: A National Strategy for Prevention and Control of Hepatitis B and C](#): "Federal, state and local agencies should expand programs to reduce the risk of hepatitis C virus infection through injection drug use by providing comprehensive hepatitis C virus prevention programs. At a minimum, the program should include access to sterile needle syringes..." In this same month, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) published [California Adult Viral Hepatitis Prevention Strategic Plan 2010-2014](#) which outlines three strategic directions. The third strategic direction is to 'target and integrate services and build infrastructure'. The practical vision includes 'statewide access to sterile syringes' detailing support for syringe exchange programs and pharmacy sale of syringes. These recommendations continue to support applied research which indicates access to sterile syringes prevents the spread of viral hepatitis and other blood-borne diseases among injection drug users, their sexual partners, infants born to women who have shared syringes, or born to women whose sexual partner has shared syringes.

Currently California's law authorizes syringe exchange or pharmacy sale of syringes only after a majority vote from a City Council or County Board of Supervisors. This has resulted in what [Center for Health Improvement](#) (CHI) describes as a 'patchwork of syringe access.' CHI's publication, [Syringe Exchange in California: Policy, Programs and Progress](#), identifies three statutory barriers to effective hepatitis and HIV control among drug injectors, their sexual partners and newborn children:

1. Syringe access requires local vote for authorization
2. Syringe possession for the purpose of injecting controlled substances is a crime
3. A ban on federal funding of syringe exchange

This third barrier was addressed in December 2009 by President Obama when he signed a budget bill that ended the 21-year old federal ban on funding for programs that supply sterile syringes to drug users.

CalHEP advocates that with passage of AB 1858 and SB 1029 programs in California will be able to take advantage of federal funding, and make rapid advancements in the prevention of viral hepatitis. CalHEP will post on our website factsheets, policy news and information, plus action alerts on how you and your organization can write to lawmakers in support of these bills. To track amendments to bills or sign up for auto-updates on changes in status or amendments [click here](#).

References

SB 1029 (Yee) (2010) http://info.sen.ca.gov/cgi-bin/postquery?bill_number=sb_1029&sess=CUR&house=B&site=sen

AB 1858 (Blumenfield) (2010) <http://www.assembly.ca.gov/acs/acsframeset2text.htm>

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Tides Foundation (2010) Past Grantees: <http://www.tidesfoundation.org/services-strategies/collective-giving/syringe-access-fund/grantees/index.html>