



## Impact of Proposed State Budget Cuts

Common Ground - The Westside HIV Community Center

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Common Ground -the Westside HIV Community Center is **the only comprehensive HIV service provider in Service Provider Area 5 (SPA 5)**. There are 3,360 individuals living with HIV in SPA 5 (primarily clustered in Santa Monica and Venice).

The agency focuses on serving several populations that historically have faced barriers in accessing health care: HIV-positive people, the homeless, those with mental illness, women, substance users (especially injection drug users), and youth. The agency has a comprehensive range of HIV prevention, care and treatment services.

More than three quarters of Common Ground's clients are living in poverty. Ninety percent are without any form of health insurance. One third of our clients are homeless. Over two-thirds of our clients access mental health services at the agency. All services are provided to clients at no-cost.

This year, Common Ground will face new challenges due to the proposed State budget cuts. These cuts will have a severe impact on our clients, particularly those living with HIV. For example, the proposed cuts to Medi-Cal's "optional health services" include cutting mental health services. When a HIV-positive person is struggling with mental illness and is unable to access Mental Health services, it becomes difficult, and often impossible, to manage the complexities of HIV disease treatment and medication adherence. Without proper disease management, a HIV-person's viral load will increase and the t-cell count will decrease. When a person's viral load is high, it is much easier to transmit HIV to sexual partners and injection drug use partners. The decrease in t-cells makes the person much more susceptible to illness and eventually, death.

Another example, Medi-Cal considers dental services (Denti-Cal) to be an "optional health service". Because of a HIV-positive person's compromised immune system a simple cavity, tooth abscess or other infection can become life-threatening if not treated immediately.

In addition, there is a proposed \$7 million cut to the AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP). This program allows low-income, under-insured and non-insured people living with HIV to have access to life-saving medications. Without medication, the majority of people living with HIV will experience a lower quality of life and a shortened life-expectancy. In addition, there is a proposed reclassification of drugs that will eliminate access to certain classes of drugs for HIV positive people. These include psychotropic, wasting syndrome and co-morbidity drugs. This will directly impact the health of our clients, and, in some cases, will be life threatening. For example, a HIV-positive person with wasting syndrome that cannot access medication will experience acceleration in the deterioration of their health.

Ultimately, our HIV Care Services Department expects to see an *increase* in the number of clients needing services in the face of *decreasing* availability of services. People with HIV are living longer. There will be over 2,000 new HIV infections in Los Angeles County this year.

Our commitment to provide critical HIV care and prevention services to underserved populations has never been more needed. We remain dedicated to the fight to bring diverse members of the Westside community together in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

For more information, please contact Sharon Chamberlain, Executive Director by phone at (310) 314-5480, ext. 127 or email [schamberlain@commongroundwestside.org](mailto:schamberlain@commongroundwestside.org) if you have any questions or would like further information.

