



County Touchpoints in Access to MAT for Justice-Involved Populations

A Joint Effort of the California Department of Health Care Services Medication Assisted Treatment Expansion Project 2.0, Health Management Associates, and California Health Policy Strategies

With funding provided by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) has launched a multi-pronged effort to address the opioid crisis by improving access to treatment, reducing unmet treatment need, and reducing opioid overdose related deaths. A variety of projects across the state are providing prevention, treatment, and recovery activities for opioid use disorder (OUD) with a strong focus on expanding access to Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT). The *County Touchpoints in Access to MAT for Justice-Involved Populations* project is focused on outreach, education, and training about opioid addiction and treatment in county criminal justice and human service systems. The project is managed by Health Management Associates and California Health Policies Strategies LLC.

Background

The United States faces an epidemic of opioid addiction and overdose deaths. Drug overdose is now the leading cause of accidental death in America. In 2017, more than 2,000 Californians died from opioid overdose and nearly 4,300 others experienced a non-fatal opioid overdose.

MAT is the use of FDA-approved prescription medications (methadone, buprenorphine/suboxone, and naltrexone/vivitrol), in combination with counseling and behavioral therapies, to provide a whole-person approach to the treatment of opioid addiction. MAT is clinically effective in alleviating symptoms of withdrawal, reducing cravings, and blocking the brain's ability to experience the opiate's effect. Research shows that a combination of MAT and behavioral therapies is a successful method to treat opioid addiction. The use of MAT on a continuing basis has been proven to cut overdose rates in half and decrease rates of HIV and hepatitis C transmission. The use of MAT just for detox, in contrast, increases mortality rates and does not improve long-term outcomes.

Using MAT specifically in criminal justice settings has proven to lower mortality. For example, the Rhode Island Department of Corrections dropped overdose deaths by 61% within a year of their MAT program (which offers all MAT medication options to inmates).

Treating OUD in jails and drug courts presents unique challenges and DHCS has funded a Learning Collaborative in which teams from 29 California counties (covering 81% of the population) are working to expand access to MAT in jails and drug courts and to assure that treatment is accessible upon release.

Nonetheless, in many communities, key criminal justice and human service personnel and processes do not consider a person “clean” if he/she is using MAT. To maintain sobriety, persons in the criminal justice system who are on MAT must rely on collaborative courts, probation, prosecutors, defenders, and human service providers who understand:

- Where MAT fits within sentencing and release decisions in a county
- If and how MAT is provided in the jails
- Precisely how, when, and where detainees can access community MAT services upon release from jail or in lieu of jail.

Often, persons in recovery must decide between receiving drug court services or regaining custody of their children and staying on MAT. Terminating MAT before it is clinically indicated increases the chance of overdose death by more than 40 times.

The County Touchpoints in Access to MAT for Justice Involved Populations Project

DHCS created this project to provide training and technical assistance to leaders, managers, and line staff in key positions of interface with the justice involved population.

Between August 2019 and September 2020, a series of training programs will be provided in a Learning Collaborative model across the state. The project team will engage **leaders** in a training program and invite them to commit the participation of their **key managers** in a second round of training and **key line staff** in a third round. Each **training session** will include didactic content and breakout sessions using **discipline-specific workbooks** with relevant case studies, resources, and discussion questions. Sessions will also be professionally videotaped and made available through a project website.

Participating organizations will also be eligible to participate in **topic-specific webinars** that highlight case studies and circumstances unique to that discipline. Where possible, educational sessions and webinars will provide **profession-specific continuing education credits**. Finally, participating organizations will also be able to request **on-site technical assistance** in overcoming local barriers to the use of MAT.

The following respected criminal justice and human service leaders have joined the project team to bring this important opportunity to their peers:

- Bonnie Dumanis (retired), District Attorneys
- Judge Len Edwards (retired), Juvenile Courts
- Judge Rogelio Flores (retired), Adult Collaborative Courts
- Howard Himes (retired), Human Services and Child Welfare
- Dave Meyer (retired), Public Defenders
- Cal Remington (retired), Probation

Questions? Contact CountyTouchpoints@healthmanagement.com

For more information on the activities of California jails and drug courts to expand MAT and resources about MAT in criminal justice, see the project website <https://MATinCountyCJ.healthmanagement.com>