



LITTLE HOOVER COMMISSION

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Commission Calls For Reform of Substance Abuse Treatment System

The Little Hoover Commission on Thursday urged the governor and the Legislature to provide more attention and oversight to substance abuse treatment, and called for reforms that would improve the treatment system and help avoid costs in the health, human service and corrections systems. The Commission called for a new treatment system model that emphasizes screening for signs of alcohol and drug abuse and early intervention strategies; employs evidence-based strategies to treat addiction; links state funding with improved outcomes; and, improves the Substance Abuse and Crime Prevention Act, or Proposition 36, by increasing the use of proven practices such as drug court models.

In its report, *Addressing Addiction: Improving & Integrating California's Substance Abuse Treatment System*, the Commission describes the effects of substance abuse on families, neighborhoods and government coffers and recommends ways to reduce the misery and cost of substance abuse by addressing addiction as a distinct problem in many state-funded programs. The report, a follow-up to a 2003 Commission report on alcohol and drug abuse treatment, calls for integrating substance abuse treatment into most health and human services and requiring counties to use performance management strategies to improve outcomes and help clients recover from substance abuse.

In both this study and its earlier report, the Commission found that when done right treatment is a cost effective way to improve public safety and keep families whole. California, however, lacks a coherent substance abuse treatment system that integrates the state's health care, foster care and corrections systems. Counties use widely divergent approaches to treatment with little oversight or accountability for results. Furthermore, state leaders have not used their influence and power to control funding to drive improvements in the system, and the money that is spent on treatment is limited and not used strategically. This failure comes despite ample resources to treat substance abuse: more is known about the pathology of substance abuse and there are now a wide array of evidence-based strategies to treat the disease.

The state spends more than \$1 billion annually on substance abuse treatment and billions more on the consequences of failing to treat addiction. As the state grapples with a budget deficit, transforming the state's substance abuse treatment system and focusing on improved outcomes and accountability could help the state cut costs associated with addiction that burden so many of the state's systems. This opportunity for strategic reform should not be missed.

"California must transform the way it pays for substance abuse treatment services and ensure that the dollars allocated to do so are used most efficiently,"

Daniel W. Hancock
Chairman

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Assemblymember

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Audra Strickland
Assemblymember

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Commission Chairman Dan Hancock said. “The state should insist on the use of proven treatment practices and require counties to measure outcomes so we, as a state, can improve the health and public safety of our citizens.”

In this study, the Commission found a real need for leadership at the state level to guide substance abuse treatment and ensure that prevention is integrated into the health care, social services and criminal justice systems throughout the state. A dearth of leadership has prevented effective planning to address substance abuse in the state, instilled little accountability into the treatment system and even allowed state agencies to ignore laws.

In *Addressing Addiction: Improving & Integrating California’s Substance Abuse Treatment System*, the Commission made the following three recommendations:

Develop a comprehensive substance abuse treatment system. The state should transform substance abuse treatment into a performance-driven system based on a comprehensive model of care through the use of incentives and mandates to improve quality, transparency and outcomes. Specifically, the Commission recommended that the state:

- Adopt a comprehensive model of care.
- Tie funding to outcomes and reward counties that demonstrate quality and improved outcomes.
- Standardize counselor certification and create tiered certification.
- Eliminate regulatory and statutory barriers that hinder counties from adopting a comprehensive model of care and a system that provides proven, cost-effective treatment.

Institutionalize understanding, leadership and oversight of substance abuse issues. To provide a more cohesive, cost-effective statewide substance abuse policy, the state should create a substance abuse policy council, require departments that deal with substance abuse issues to collect standardized data on substance abuse issues and develop strategies to reduce alcohol and drug abuse. To increase oversight and focus, the Legislature should create a permanent, joint committee on alcohol and drug abuse.

Transform programs for nonviolent drug offenders. The state should work with the judiciary to develop standards for a continuum of services for nonviolent drug offenders. The state should reform Proposition 36 to develop goals for Proposition 36 offenders and reward or penalize counties based on reaching those goals, and require counties to employ drug court models for at least some Proposition 36 offenders.

The Little Hoover Commission is a bipartisan and independent state agency charged with recommending ways to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of state programs. The Commission’s recommendations are sent to the governor and the Legislature. To obtain a copy of the report, *Addressing Addiction: Improving & Integrating California’s Substance Abuse Treatment System*, contact the Commission or visit its Web site: www.lhc.ca.gov/lhc.html.