

Examining the Impact of the HIV-related State Budget Cuts

Problem: During the summer of 2009, the State of California experienced an unprecedented budget crisis, resulting in cuts to social services across the state. Approximately \$85 million was eliminated from the budget of the State Office of AIDS (OA) for FY 2009-2010, about half of the allocation of \$167 million in FY 2008-2009.

Following the cuts, reports in the local media and press releases indicated that several community-based organizations (CBOs) and AIDS service organizations (ASOs) had to close their doors or drastically reduce the level of HIV-related services, including activities such as HIV testing and counseling. The UCSF AIDS Policy Center Rapid Response Team conducted this study to gather more details on the impact of these budget reductions.

Question:

What has been the impact of state budget cuts on HIV-related services in California?

Methods: This study utilized rapid appraisal procedures in three diverse counties -- Alameda, Fresno, and Los Angeles. These counties were selected based on the size and epidemiological characteristics of their epidemics, their location in the state, and whether they received direct federal funding through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

A team of researchers collected data in the three counties from January-April 2010. They spent five to seven days in each field

“All of the band-aids are on”

site, conducting a total of 44 in-depth interviews with service providers, clinicians, CBO/ASO board members or Executive Directors, members of local planning councils, health department staff, and consumers. The interview activities were augmented with a review of pertinent epidemiological data, local media accounts, minutes from local planning councils, and relevant written reports or presentations. All study procedures were approved by the UCSF Committee on Human Research.

Activities: The UCSF AIDS Policy Center Rapid Response Team has presented on this research twice: (1) The CAPS Conference, held in San Francisco in April 2010; (2) The Policy Research Advisory Committee (PRAC) meeting, held in Los Angeles in June 2010.

Findings: We found that five factors influenced the response to state budget cuts in each county: size, cohesion, transparency, access to outside resources, and networks to policy decision makers.

Larger counties made difficult decisions to cut lower priority services in order to

maintain core prevention and care services; cohesion and transparency regarding the local impact of the cuts helped maintain morale among service providers despite widespread layoffs, and access to outside resources and networks to policy makers allowed those “in the know” to be better prepared when the budget cuts occurred so they could keep their doors open. Participants across all counties feared that California’s HIV incidence rates will rise in the coming years, with the loss of state funds for comprehensive approaches to HIV prevention.

Please see our full report for more detail:

http://ari.ucsf.edu/programs/policy/state_budget_cuts.pdf

Policy Implications: As the California economy recovers, it will be important to invest in the services that have been reduced or eliminated -- particularly early HIV detection, linkage to care and support services to maintain individuals in care and improve health outcomes.

Renewed efforts should be undertaken to bring key stakeholders, particularly local planners and HIV service providers, into discussions of the potential implications of future budget forecasting.

