

County of Santa Clara

Office of the County Executive

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DATE: February 7, 2023

TO: Honorable Board of Supervisors
Jeffrey V. Smith, County Executive

FROM: Rene Santiago, Deputy County Executive/ Director, Health System ^{DS} RS
Sherri Terao, Director of Behavioral Health Services ^{DS} ST

SUBJECT: Medical Detoxification Access and Data

During the Board of Supervisors Meeting on December 6, 2022, (Item No. 15), Supervisor Chavez requested that Administration provide a clear, public-facing explanation of medical detoxification services and access. At the same meeting, Supervisor Lee requested data on medical detoxification referrals, utilization of services, and waitlists, if any.

Types of Withdrawal Management Services

A person who has developed an alcohol or drug dependency may experience physical and psychological symptoms when they stop or significantly reduce intake of the drug or alcohol. These symptoms may range significantly in severity from one person to another, and may include fatigue, anxiety, nausea, delirium, hallucinations, and seizures. An individual going through withdrawal may be supported by a range of Withdrawal Management services including medical detoxification, commonly known as medical detox. Withdrawal management services, including medical detoxification, can help individuals with severe withdrawal symptoms stop drinking or using drugs more safely and comfortably.

A physician or other substance use treatment provider can help someone decide if medical detox, is necessary or if another form of substance use treatment is more appropriate. The treatment provider makes sure that the recommended care is safe, addresses all risks, and is “least restrictive” as possible, which helps to avoid unnecessary treatment. Many professionals use the American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) Criteria to assist in determining the appropriate level of care. The State of California’s Drug Medi-Cal Organized Delivery System (DMC-ODS) requires counties to use the ASAM Criteria to determine placement into the appropriate level of care for all Medi-Cal beneficiaries.

Individuals experiencing mild or moderate withdrawal symptoms are usually able to manage their symptoms with **Outpatient Services** from clinicians, case managers, nurses, or other medical professionals.

Some individuals with moderate to severe withdrawal symptoms are treated in a residential setting that provides 24-hour support. In these **Social Detoxification** programs, individuals must be ambulatory and not at risk for significant adverse physical reactions withdrawing from the substance on which they are dependent. The Pathways program is an example of a social detox program. Staff in social detox programs are certified as Addiction Counselors or Peer Recovery Specialists, but do not have the professional training necessary to address physical symptoms associated with withdrawal in patients with severe physical (rather than psychological) dependence.

Medical detox is a type of Withdrawal Management service for individuals whose withdrawal symptoms and medical complications require monitoring or management in an inpatient medical setting, most commonly an acute care hospital. All three of County operated acute care hospitals provide medical detox to patients who are hospitalized for another medical condition begin experiencing withdrawal or arrive at the emergency department in withdrawal and need treatment for acute withdrawal symptoms. Medical detox services typically include 24-hour nursing care and periodic physician visits. Patients who receive medical detox are generally then discharged to a social detox, residential treatment, or other outpatient support program.

Accessing Medical Detox

California's Mental Health Parity Act, as amended in 2020, requires all state-regulated commercial health plans and insurers to provide full coverage for the treatment of all mental health conditions and substance use disorders, including medical detox.

If someone is experiencing **severe withdrawal symptoms**, they should be taken to the nearest hospital emergency department for evaluation and possible admission for medical detox. The County's three hospitals provide medical detox services to about 120 individuals per year. Most of these individuals present at the emergency medicine department and are then admitted to the hospital. In some cases, individuals are admitted to the hospital for a medical condition, but later determined to also need medical detox services.

Although medical detox can be provided in other healthcare facilities, most individuals in our county and throughout the state receive medical detox services in general acute care hospitals. This is particularly true for individuals on Medi-Cal, as non-hospital-based medical detox programs licensed by the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) generally do not accept Medi-Cal. In Santa Clara County, both Medi-Cal managed care plans refer their members to general acute care hospitals for medical detox.

If someone is experiencing **more mild withdrawal symptoms** and/or is interested in receiving other forms of substance use treatment, they should call their physician to be evaluated and to obtain a referral for the appropriate level of treatment. Alternatively, they can contact the Behavioral Health Department through its call center or other channels, as discussed in further detail below. BHSD also has a public website (<https://bhsd.sccgov.org/programs-services/substance-use-services>) that informs individuals about substance use treatment services (SUTS) and how to access care. There is also an e-brochure

(https://bhsd.sccgov.org/sites/g/files/exjcpb711/files/BHSD-SUTS-brochure_2019-Mar_English.pdf) that treatment providers can share with clients about our services. The brochure is available in English, Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Tagalog, and Farsi.

Accessing Withdrawal Management and Other Forms of Substance Use Treatment Through the County Behavioral Health Department

Many residents are unlikely to know what type of withdrawal management services they may need and are eligible for. One critical role of the County Behavioral Health Department is to provide residents with information and help them access substance use disorder treatment. If an individual is interested in receiving treatment, they may call the BHSD Call Center (800-704-0900) to receive a phone screening and referral for treatment. BHSD Call Center staff will help residents access the right level of care and/or help the resident navigate services and benefits through their own insurance provider.

In addition to helping residents navigate systems of care, County medical social workers can assist patients who are receiving medical detox at County hospitals access outpatient behavioral health services through one of the County's 11 outpatient clinics or through the specialty clinics of the Behavioral Health Services Department (BHSD) and its contractors.

Exploration of Medical Detox Service Expansion

In December, BHSD became a part the Substance Use Disorder Medical Collaborative organized by local addiction medicine physicians. The Department is leveraging its participation in the collaborative to gather feedback from treatment providers about the successes and challenges of our current substance use treatment system of care for Medi-Cal beneficiaries.

BHSD is also exploring potential opportunities to expand access to medical detox in non-acute-care hospital settings. Discussions are ongoing with potential providers that do not currently offer this service but may be willing to consider offering this level of care to Medi-Cal beneficiaries in the future. Such an expansion would help preserve critical inpatient hospital beds for patients with other medical conditions.

Medical Detoxification Referrals, Utilization of Services, and Waitlist

BHSD Call Center tracks substance use treatment services (SUTS) requests and referrals. **Table 1** shows the number of referrals received by the Call Center in calendar year (CY) 2022 for each of the SUTS modality. **Table 2** shows the number of SUTS admissions, and **Table 3** shows the number of unduplicated SUTS clients based on utilization data. Please note individuals referred to one modality might be admitted to a different level of care depending on the outcome of the assessment by the treatment provider.

No patients are on a waiting list for medical detox services, as individuals experiencing severe withdrawal symptoms are directed to the nearest hospital emergency department where they will be provided medical detox. Any patient seen at the County's three hospitals who needs

medical detox is admitted to the hospital and provided care until they are ready for discharge; none are ever placed on a waiting list for this level of care.

Table 1. SUTS Referrals by Modality

Modality	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4
Outpatient	982	1,020	1,025	944
Intensive Outpatient Program	13	13	15	21
Medication Assisted Treatment	17	16	37	44
Narcotic Treatment Program	169	139	129	77
Residential	211	214	255	224
Social Detoxification	203	309	279	267

Table 2. Admissions by Modality

Modality	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4
Outpatient	597	593	707	673
Intensive Outpatient Program	47	40	46	10
Medication Assisted Treatment	16	24	20	14
Narcotic Treatment Program	87	103	91	60
Residential	159	195	226	182
Social Detoxification	97	130	142	149

Table 3. Unduplicated Clients by Modality

Modality	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4
Outpatient	1,198	1,129	1,191	1,041
Intensive Outpatient Program	91	65	96	62
Medication Assisted Treatment	62	51	48	50
Narcotic Treatment Program	528	529	504	474
Residential	210	252	292	243
Social Detoxification	99	129	140	109

cc: Board Chiefs of Staff
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