



San Francisco Department of Public Health

Grant Colfax, MD
Director of Health

City and County of San Francisco
London N. Breed
Mayor

Director's Report for Health Commission Meeting of December 19, 2023

A current overview of issues affecting the state of public health in San Francisco

<https://sf.gov/departments/san-francisco-health-commission/past-meetings>

In alignment with the California Department of Public Health, we will no longer report on COVID-19 case data. More people are now testing themselves at home for COVID-19 and we do not get data from at-home testing. This affects the accuracy of data on testing volume. We will continue to report on key indicators of COVID-19 severity and spread including [hospitalizations](#), [deaths](#), and [test positivity](#).

BUDGET UPDATE: MID-YEAR BUDGET REDUCTIONS ACCEPTED BY THE MAYOR, BUDGET INSTRUCTION FOR FY 2024-25 AND FY 2025-26

In October, the Mayor issued instructions to start making budget reductions in the current fiscal year to get a head start on what will be a challenging budget process this spring. We were asked to pause uninitiated programs, eliminate vacant positions, take advantage of new revenues, and to start scaling back programs or shift to other, non-General Fund sources of funding. In total, the Mayor's Office identified General Fund budget reductions amounting to approximately \$75 million in the current fiscal year, and ongoing, around \$35 million in each year thereafter.

DPH's general fund savings comprised more than \$30 million in the current fiscal year and then more than \$8 million a year ongoing, starting in FY 2024-25. In the current year, we have adjusted our projections to reflect an additional \$23 million in prior year, Medi-Cal settlement revenues above our budgeted revenues. DPH also contributed by identifying 55 vacant FTEs from across the Department that can be held in the current year and then deleted without impacting operations, for a savings of \$4.5 million a year starting in the current year. We also agreed to an additional \$2 million in attrition savings in the current year and ongoing, in recognition of current vacancy levels across the department. DPH identified a new, \$250,000 a year overdose response program that we could shift from the General Fund to the opioid settlement funds. Finally, the Mayor's Office also instructed DPH to pause spending on \$1,175,000 of uninitiated programs as follows:

- \$500,000 for unallocated mental health and wellbeing grants
- \$100,000 for FY24 Addback – Health services for Spanish-speaking population
- \$175,000 for FY24 Addback – Expansion of labor and postpartum doula programs
- \$400,000 for FY22 uninitiated COVID mental health training programs



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The Health Commission will see these savings reflected in our quarterly financial reporting this year and in our budget proposal. The Mayor's Office will count these savings towards the General Fund reductions we must come up with to meet reduction targets, representing a first step towards meeting those challenges.

On December 13th, the Mayor issued her instructions to departments for their FY 2024-25 and FY 2025-26 budget submissions. Unfortunately, the landscape is challenging. Local revenue growth is flat due to: ongoing reductions to property tax as the office market resets, a plateauing in the hospitality sector rebound, transfer taxes at 2011 levels, and tepid business tax growth. Expenditures are escalating more quickly, including a 9% increase in projected employee health rates. As a result, departments are requested to submit proposals to meet 10% General Fund reduction targets in each year of the proposed budget and a 5% contingency target, with savings that can be taken if the situation worsens. For DPH, the reduction target is \$93.8 million in each year of the budget and the contingency target is an additional \$46.9 million. The instructions also ask that Departments not add new positions.

We will return to the Commission in January with greater details on the instructions and in early February with a full budget proposal.

DPH AWARDS GRANT TO ASSIST IN REDUCING OVERDOSE DEATH DISPARITIES

DPH has awarded a \$2.25 million grant to the Homeless Children's Network (HCN) as part of an ongoing investment and commitment to reducing racial disparities in drug overdose deaths through prevention, engagement and education.

This grant funding, which will be allotted as \$450,000 per year over five years, will help expand the capacity of HCN, a San Francisco community-based organization, to prevent and lessen harmful health outcomes associated with substance use, and to reduce overdose death disparities through innovative, tailored approaches. Funding for the grant comes from opioid settlement funds and state Mental Health Services Act funds and is the first of several investments DPH intends to make in the Black/African American community to address drug overdoses. DPH recognizes the breadth and depth of this crisis in the Black/African American community necessitates meaningful and sustained support.

Black/African Americans in San Francisco experience fatal overdoses at 5-times the city-wide rate. This community partnership funding aligns with the DPH goal to reduce racial disparities in fatal overdose among Black/African Americans.



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A primary goal for DPH is to collaborate with and empower the Black community in overcoming disparities. To strengthen these efforts the Office of Overdose Prevention staff have provided Overdose Recognition and Response training to several community-based organizations (CBOs) that primarily serve the B/AA community. This training equips staff with the knowledge and skills to identify and respond to overdose situations effectively. By empowering these organizations, their capacity is strengthened to support individuals and family members effected by substance use.

Additional investments in the expansion of overdose prevention services, including increased capacity for treatment navigation with a focused expertise on the unique cultural needs of the Black/African American community, are part of the approach the City is taking to address this crisis.

SAN FRANCISCO BEGINS WASTEWATER ANALYSIS FOR FENTANYL, XYLAZINE AND OTHER HIGH-RISK SUBSTANCES

DPH, with the assistance of the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC), has begun wastewater testing for substances such as fentanyl to track trends and inform response activities.

San Francisco is one of 70 communities in the United States participating in the first-of-its-kind initiative by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) to gauge and measure the presence of substances associated with adverse health consequences, including overdose, through wastewater testing.

Earlier this month, at the request of DPH, SFPUC began sending wastewater samples from two major wastewater treatment plants to Biobot Analytics (Biobot), a Cambridge, Mass.-based scientific laboratory services company that received a federal contract for the NIDA Wastewater Surveillance Program. DPH is expected to receive initial results in January, and then every two weeks going forward. San Francisco's participation comes at no cost to the City. Under the current contract, the program is scheduled to end late August 2024.

Biobot is testing San Francisco's wastewater for fentanyl, methamphetamine, amphetamine, cocaine, and xylazine – and their metabolites – as well as naloxone, the antidote to an opioid overdose, and its metabolite.

The data will give a broad picture of use within the community, but not at the individual level. The results cannot be traced to a specific neighborhood or household. Additionally, NIDA stipulates that the data can only be used for public health and academic purposes and can specifically not be used by law enforcement.



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PRIMARY CARE STAFF RECOGNITION

DPH's indispensable Primary Care team hosted their annual appreciation awards event earlier this week. All 500 Primary Care team members were invited to join the festivities, including eligibility workers, medical assistants, behavioral health clinicians, health workers, nurses and providers, podiatrists, nutritionists, acupuncturists, dentists, hygienists and aides. The Awards event highlighted the tremendous work of the team serving nearly 90,000 of our most vulnerable San Franciscans. Since recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, our Primary Care team logged more than 250,000 visits this calendar year, up 23% since 2020. Bravo! The event also celebrates the dedicated Primary Care team – this year we recognized staff members with over 40 years of service.

ZSFG's BEHAVIORAL EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM RECEIVES EQUITY AWARD

This month, ZSFG's Behavioral Emergency Response Team (BERT) received the Equity Quality Leaders Award from The California Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems.

BERT is a behavioral health rapid response initiative that began in 2018 and has been pivotal in addressing the inequitable use of force on patients at ZSFG. Its success lies in the implementation of a trauma-informed approach to care, ensuring both safety for staff and patients in the workplace by de-escalating difficult situations before they become violent.

In 2022, the team conducted 2,085 rounding consultations, increasing the opportunity to prevent violence before it happens, and educated and supported the hospital's care teams. 94 percent of the team's activations were deemed successful through mostly verbal de-escalation and/or verbal redirection, with 84 percent completed without law enforcement involvement. Overall, use of force was down 24 percent from the previous year and decreased for all races and ethnicities.

BERT is helping ZSFG achieve its True North goals of ensuring workforce equity, eliminating health disparities and building a culture of belonging and inclusion. Congratulations to the whole team.

ZSFG RECOGNIZED FOR REDUCING DISPARITIES IN CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE

ZSFG's Cardiology team was recognized in "America's Essential Hospitals" newest report: Novel Hospital Initiatives to Target Cardiovascular Disease Disparities.

The team expanded and implemented a Heart Failure Care Pathway integrated into EPIC and tailored to our patients' needs by targeting social determinants of health. This intervention led to a



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more than 10 percent drop in 30-day readmission rates, a reduction in mortality rate, and a decrease in racial disparities in readmissions.

The development of a decision support tool for the inpatient treatment of heart failure that targets both clinical care and social determinants of health was an ambitious undertaking for the team at ZSFG. The team is exploring opportunities to expand the tool's use for outpatient care and other chronic health issues, such as hypertension and opioid use.

DPH ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH BRANCH'S RETAIL TOBACCO PROGRAM AWARDED DOJ TOBACCO ENFORCEMENT GRANT

The Environmental Health Branch's Retail Tobacco Program applied for a Department of Justice tobacco enforcement grant. Historically, the program has applied for these grants and had them awarded in the past, but this year's grant award was the largest in the program's history. The DOJ has agreed to an award amount of \$2,888,144. As you are aware, DPH is anticipating budget cuts over the next few fiscal years, so securing this funding has been very timely and will ensure the continued enforcement of retail tobacco laws which include: underage sales, sales of flavored tobacco, selling tobacco without a permit and illegal online sales. This work is incredibly important because in 2023 an estimated 2.8 million U.S. middle and high school students will begin to use e-cigarettes. Most of these are flavored tobacco products marketed directly to this demographic. Flavored tobacco products are not just sold at retail stores, but many are sold online. Along these lines, the EHB Retail Tobacco Program surveyed hundreds of online tobacco retailers and found that around 120 online businesses did not block the sales of flavored tobacco in San Francisco. The program took this information to the City Attorney's Office and based on their work, on December 5th, City Attorney David Chiu announced a lawsuit against three online tobacco retailers for unlawfully selling flavored tobacco products and electronic cigarettes to consumers in San Francisco. San Francisco Health Officer Dr. Susan Philip recently stated, "Flavored tobacco products harm the health of our youth, and especially youth in communities of color." Thanks to the tireless enforcement work of the EHB Retail Tobacco Program, the lives of San Franciscans are being saved every day.

DPH ABESTOS AND HAZARDOUS MATERIALS AND WASTE PROGRAM IN ACTION

The Environmental Health Branch's (EHB) Asbestos and Hazardous Materials and Waste Programs recently received the final set of penalties resulting from an enforcement case involving the unauthorized release of asbestos and other hazardous materials at a construction project involving a large residential property on Grove Street. This case started back in 2019 with EHB issuing an Administrative Civil Complaint for work practices which demonstrated little or no regard for the



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effects of dust and debris on the workers, public and the environment. This case has involved several staff from both EHB and the City Attorney's office. As the result of their extra effort and hard work, an additional \$500,000 in penalties was paid this week by the responsible party bringing the total in penalties for DPH to over \$850,000. In addition, the City Attorney's Office required the responsible party to sell the property to a buyer that could properly oversee development of the long vacant property while limiting impact to nearby residents. Due to staff's dedication to protecting the health and safety of city residents, the hazard to the neighborhood has been abated and the property will now be safely developed into multi-residential housing.

COVID-19 UPDATE

As of 12/14:

- San Francisco's 7-day rolling average of COVID test positivity is 4.9% and there are 40 COVID hospitalizations.
- Twenty-four percent of SF residents are fully up to date on their COVID vaccinations and have received the updated vaccine.

[DPH in the News](#)