

# AIDS education funds run dry

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SANTA CRUZ — The county will lose two of its primary AIDS education and prevention programs in July, victims of competition for money and the state's move to target regions where the epidemic is raging most fiercely.

Both Planned Parenthood and the county Health Service Agency's AIDS program, which had applied to renew three-year contracts with the state Health Department's Office of AIDS, have been denied funding and will have to drop their programs by July 1.

"Unless we find other sources of funding, this program ... will not exist," said Delores Saluppo, senior health educator

for the county's AIDS program.

The programs operate under state grants to counsel and educate the county's jail populations and probationers, at-risk groups such as intravenous drug users and young gay men, and teen-agers.

Additionally, ETR Associates of Scotts Valley, which had run the state's clearinghouse for AIDS information for the funded programs, was passed over in favor of a contractor in Southern California.

"As a community, Santa Cruz has been hit hard," said Jill Ferguson, director of community education for Planned Parenthood. "... It's a very frustrating and sad situation."

The county's two other applicants for the state's AIDS education funding, Salud

Para La Gente in Watsonville and the Santa Cruz AIDS project, were granted new contracts. But while SCAP was given a slight increase over its previous award, Salud's funding was cut back.

As of January, Santa Cruz County had 203 reported cases of people with AIDS, 132 of whom have died, according to state figures. Public health officials estimate that as many as 3,000 people could be infected with the HIV virus here and not yet show symptoms of AIDS.

Statewide, there have been more than 50,000 reported AIDS cases to date, and an estimated 146,000 people infected with HIV, with 8,000 to 16,000 new infections expected each year.

Local program directors say that the

state's decision will leave "big gaps" in the county's ability to provide comprehensive AIDS education, and comes without any clear explanation why certain programs weren't funded.

Wayne Sauseda, director of the the state Office of AIDS, said all four local proposals scored well enough in their evaluations to make the cut for funding.

"There just wasn't enough money to get to them all," said Sauseda.

Part of the reason, he said, was the overwhelming number of requests his office received this year — over \$77 million worth, with just \$16 million available to give out.

Part of that \$16 million was set aside this year, earmarked for statewide AIDS

education projects, including the California AIDS Clearinghouse, minority AIDS resource centers and AIDS hotlines.

Another \$2 million was reserved for two new programs in AIDS education — half for HIV prevention programs to be run in conjunction with the state Department of Education, and another \$1 million for providing AIDS education in rural areas.

Those new priorities left remaining agencies competing for less money. To decide who would get what was left, Sauseda said, the state looked at where the disease is "burning brightest," using statistics on the number of AIDS cases, rates of infection for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, birth rates and the number of

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drug treatment recipients, among other criteria.

Programs in regions that didn't show a swift spread were either reduced or not funded, Sauseda said.

"There really aren't many choices without additional funding," said Sauseda. "... The blanket becomes thinner. It's a difficult situation all around."

No programs in Santa Cruz County would have been funded if it weren't for the new pool of funds set aside for rural areas, he said.

When the contracts are awarded, SCAP will get somewhere between \$108,000 and \$120,000 annually for the next three years, up from \$95,000 in its previous contract.

Salud will receive \$112,500 to \$125,000, down from \$169,000, according to Sauseda.

By contrast, the county's AIDS program will lose its \$90,000 a year, and Planned Parenthood \$47,000.

Both agencies said some full- and part-time counselors and educators in their programs are likely to lose their jobs.

Even though Salud did receive funding, Ricardo MacKee, an HIV/AIDS prevention outreach worker, said it was no cause to "jump up and down. ...

"We're losing programs as it is. It's terrible," said

MacKee. The budget reductions come at a time when AIDS prevention and education workers have been making inroads with hard-to-reach populations, he said. The county program had applied for a much larger grant this year, hoping to expand to target the homeless and the partners of those infected with HIV.

In addition, if some new sources of AIDS funding should open up in the future, said MacKee, the county and Planned Parenthood will "have to start from ground zero again," and "the amount of people applying for (grants) is going to be extra large."

Even more frustrating, said Ferguson, is that the four local providers had worked in tandem to coordinate their prevention programs so there wouldn't be any overlap in service.

"There's no way that Salud and SCAP can pick up what the county and Planned Parenthood have been doing," said Ferguson. "... The programs were built into each other, and all of that is lost now."

Saluppo said the county AIDS program plans to appeal the decision. Agencies have until March 29 to ask for their proposal to be reviewed.

*Sentinel staff writer Greg Beebe contributed to this report.*