

DHCS Alert (5.27.21): Closure of 29 Lags Pain Clinics

Alert: High numbers of patients on controlled medications may need help connecting to new pain management and/or MAT providers, due to the closure of 29 Lags Medical Centers, which operate high-volume pain management clinics in California.

Request:

DHCS encourages MAT providers to consider the use of buprenorphine for pain indications for patients who are opioid-dependent and have difficulty finding providers to continue full-agonist opioid treatment, when medically necessary. These patients are likely to be at risk if they are unable to connect to ongoing medical care. Please also prescribe naloxone, where appropriate, as a safety measure. The attached resource list could be used by local organizations to share contact information for local resources.

The California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) is working with health plans and community organizations to create transition plans for the patients. However, because Lags Medical Centers advertises over 30,000 patients served in California, we anticipate that many patients may have difficulty obtaining new pain management providers, given the suddenness of the clinic closures and the high volume of affected patients.

Affected counties: Los Angeles, Ventura, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, Kern, Tulare, Kings, Monterey, Santa Cruz, Fresno, Madera, Merced, Alameda, Stanislaus, San Joaquin, Sacramento

Background:

On May 19, 2021, DHCS temporarily suspended select Lags Medical Centers locations from participation in the Medi-Cal program because of an ongoing investigation by the California Department of Justice (DOJ), Division of Medi-Cal Fraud and Elder Abuse, involving allegations of fraudulent billing and potential patient harm. On May 25, 2021, DHCS learned that Lags Medical Centers voluntarily closed 29 California locations this month, even though DHCS only suspended seven National Provider Identifier numbers associated with up to 17 locations, potentially impacting about 20,000 beneficiaries access to pain management care.

The centers are spine, sports medicine, and pain management clinics operating in the following counties: Alameda, Fresno, Kern, Kings, Los Angeles, Madera, Merced, Monterey, Sacramento, San Joaquin, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz, Stanislaus, Tulare, and Ventura. See web archive for city locations: [LAGS Medical Centers \(archive.org\)](https://www.archive.org/details/LAGS-Medical-Centers)

DHCS is contacting the Department of Managed Health Care and the involved Medi-Cal managed care plans to ensure they are reaching out to their affected members to connect them to needed services. DHCS also is alerting local partners to ensure they are aware of the clinic closures, and that they know to refer patients to their health plan or Medi-Cal Ombudsman (888) 452-8609 or MMCDOmbudsmanOffice@dhcs.ca.gov if they need help connecting to care.

DHCS anticipates that patients may have difficulty finding new providers, as there is a national shortage of pain management providers. DHCS is particularly concerned about patients dependent on controlled medications, as these patients are at high risk of decompensation and accidental overdose, if this transition is not carefully managed. The attached resource list could be used by local organizations to connect patients to resources.

Access Sites for Health Services and Treatment

Patients taking opioid or other controlled medications on a daily basis are at extremely high risk if they lose access to their regular prescriber, such as after a clinic closure. Patients must urgently be connected to a new provider, before medications run out and withdrawal symptoms start. Withdrawal symptoms are usually severe, which can lead patients to seek out illicit drugs. Many illicit drugs are contaminated with fentanyl, and use can lead to accidental overdose death.

The grid below can be used by local organizations to connect people to needed resources – especially for patients who no longer have access to a prescriber for pain medications. Local organizations can fill in local contact information, and distribute to organizations who may be impacted by clinic closures.

Program	Local contacts	Notes
County Access Line: mental health		https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/individuals/Pages/MHPContactList.aspx 24/7 intake line for mental health services
County Access Line: substance use disorders		https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/individuals/Pages/SUD_County_Access_Lines.aspx 24/7 intake line for substance use disorder treatment services
Medi-Cal Managed Care Plans		https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/individuals/Pages/MMCDHealthPlanDir.aspx County directory of Medi-Cal managed care plans
Buprenorphine Providers: including telehealth		Buprenorphine is an effective, safe alternative for patients on high-dose opioid medications. While comparable to morphine and oxycodone for pain control, the risk of overdose is a fraction of the risk of other opioids, without many side effects of other opioids. Buprenorphine treatment locator: https://www.samhsa.gov/medication-assisted-treatment/practitioner-program-data/treatment-practitioner-locator This CHCF publication lists telehealth providers that offer buprenorphine (some providers offer pain management and addiction treatment; others may only offer addiction treatment). The California Telehealth Resource Center lists telehealth specialty providers.
Emergency Department Bridge Program		Over 200 hospitals have programs in their emergency departments where patients may receive buprenorphine to bridge people to treatment, especially if they come in with withdrawal symptoms https://cabridge.org/impact/mat-sites/ www.cabridge.org
Community clinics		California Primary Care Association directory of clinics for patients needing a new primary care provider. People may also call their health plan for primary care options.
Methadone Maintenance (narcotic treatment program)		California directory of narcotic (opioid) treatment programs: https://dpt2.samhsa.gov/treatment/directory.aspx
Syringe Service Program		California directory: https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DOA/Pages/OA_prev_sepdirectory.aspx

Naloxone Access Site		Every patient taking opioids in any form on a daily basis, including those prescribed by a doctor, should have naloxone available in case of an overdose. Naloxone (Narcan) nasal spray can be used by family, friends or a bystander to reverse an overdose and save a life. Naloxone is available on Medi-Cal, insurance plans, and can be available without a prescription.
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