Advocates: Budget Cuts Will Increase HIV in California

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AIDS advocates fear that severe cutbacks to California's HIV/AIDS funds will increase HIV rates in the state's hard hit regions, according to the *Bay Area Reporter*. Earlier this week, in an attempt to manage the state's $24 billion deficit, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger used his line-item veto power to cut $52 million in HIV/AIDS funding from his revised budget; coupled with cuts to the state's Office of AIDS, this would eliminate as much as $85 million for HIV/AIDS funding.

"My worry is if this doesn't get remedied, we are going to see a substantial increase in new HIV infections in San Francisco, particularly if they are cutting prevention activities and testing," said Mark Cloutier, CEO of the San Francisco AIDS Foundation, which expects to lose $800,000 in funding from the state. "I am optimistic this is not the final story on this, but we need to mobilize the community to support the efforts to restore the money."

When asked if Schwarzenegger's cuts will lead to an increase in new HIV infections in the state, Michelle Roland, director of the state's AIDS office, said she is "concerned about that possibility." She added, "One of my focuses is going to be looking for grant opportunities and making sure that we have adequate staffing to apply for grants."

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