



## Restoring Black Infant Health Program High on List of Advocates' Concerns

**Monday, May 12, 2014**

The Senate budget subcommittee for Health and Human Services last week took up general budget issues, producing a long line of people testifying about what they'd like to see in this month's budget revision.

The governor is expected to release his revised version of the budget tomorrow.

"Communities of color are going to be primarily the remaining uninsured and they're afflicted by higher rates of chronic disease and by greater health disparities," said Sarah de Guia, director of government affairs for the California Pan-Ethnic Health Network, at the May 8 hearing. "The programs ... we would like to see restored really go toward reducing some of those disparities ... [such as] the Black Infant Health Program."

The state program has been successful in reducing black infant mortality rates and should have its funding restored, de Guia said.

De Guia also pushed the committee to fund the Early Mental Health Initiative, an increase in Medi-Cal provider rates, efforts to expand access to primary care and the effort to cover the residually uninsured.

The state might want to look more closely at funding the prevention and treatment of chronic conditions, said Lynn Silver, senior advisor for chronic disease and obesity at the Public Health Institute.

"We're all aware of the rapidly growing burden of diabetes and other chronic diseases affecting 14 million Californians and responsible for over three-quarters of our health care costs," Silver said. "The burden of chronic illness is too great, too painful, too unfairly distributed and too expensive for the state to fail to act effectively to prevent."

Silver advanced the idea of creating a California wellness trust: "We propose that California stock its rainy day fund by investing in prevention," Silver said, "using a small part of its budgetary surplus to invest in evidence-based community prevention programs" through the trust.

According to Sean South, associate director of policy and legislation at California Primary Care Association, the BIH program stands out as one of the best uses of funding, since the cost is low and the benefit is high, he said.

"These vital programs unfortunately were cut in the darkest days of our state," South said, "but we've come out of it, and it's good we can talk about restorations finally."