

The California State Auditor released the following report today:

Los Angeles County

Lacking a Comprehensive Assessment of Its Trauma System, It Cannot Demonstrate That It Has Used Measure B Funds to Address the Most Pressing Trauma Needs

BACKGROUND

In 2002 the voters of Los Angeles County (Los Angeles) approved Measure B—an annual special parcel tax—to, among other things, provide funding to maintain all aspects of the countywide system of trauma centers and expand the system to cover all areas of the county. The Board of Supervisors for the County of Los Angeles (board) can and has increased the original tax several times to its current rate of 4.24 cents per square foot on certain improvements. The board also allocates Measure B funds each year. The Los Angeles Emergency Medical Services Agency (EMS) oversees Los Angeles's trauma system, which encompasses 14 trauma centers that service every geographical area of Los Angeles.

KEY FINDINGS

During our review of Los Angeles's management of Measure B funds for fiscal years 2008–09 through 2011–12, we noted the following:

- Nearly 11 years after voters approved Measure B, Los Angeles has not conducted a comprehensive assessment of its trauma system and some areas remain underserved because they lack a trauma center within close proximity.
- Los Angeles continues to use the same allocation approach to distribute Measure B funds that it implemented in 2003 when a board-created oversight committee recommended it.
 - ✓ It uses most of the revenues to reimburse the hospitals and trauma centers for uncompensated care—treatment of patients who are unable to pay for their care and who have no third-party insurance coverage.
 - ✓ The approach to allocating Measure B funds has resulted in significant fund balances over at least the four fiscal years within our audit period.
 - ✓ For more than nine years following the dissolution of the oversight committee in 2004, the board has remained without a key body to oversee and advise it on the allocation of Measure B funds.
- Although Los Angeles initially used Measure B funds to provide for helicopter transport of trauma patients from underserved areas as an interim solution, it has continued to use such helicopter services yet does not monitor, assess, or report consistently on the adequacy of these services.
- Though it acknowledges that the underserved area of East San Gabriel Valley could support a trauma center, Los Angeles has made minimal efforts to persuade a hospital in that area to join the trauma system. By undertaking efforts to understand the hospital's concerns for joining the trauma system, particularly as they relate to funding, the board could revisit its Measure B allocations and use that money, or funds in reserve, to offer financial support to the hospital.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommended to the board that it use Measure B funds to engage the American College of Surgeons by July 2014 to perform a comprehensive assessment, and to undertake strategies to address any weaknesses in the trauma system that may be identified. Additionally, to ensure it allocates funds to address the most significant needs of Los Angeles's residents, we recommended the board reinstate a Measure B oversight committee. Further, Los Angeles should embark on formal discussions regarding the feasibility of a hospital in East San Gabriel Valley becoming a trauma center. Moreover, EMS should collect, assess, and report helicopter transport data for the trauma victims from underserved areas to determine the adequacy and effectiveness of the helicopter services.