

Testimony to the Little Hoover Commission on Prop 36
Lou Martinez, graduate and counselor
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My name is Lou Martinez. I am 35 years old. My drinking career started at the age of fifteen. We used to go to keg parties on the weekend after football games. I blacked out from the very first time, but I loved it. I loved the euphoric feeling that alcohol gave me. It made all my fears and worries go away. It gave me confidence. By the time I turned 17, I had already progressed to drinking gin on a weekly basis. Sometimes even on the weeknights. I was starting to get into trouble about that time as well. Whenever I would drink, I would get into fist fights. I started to get tickets from the police for being a minor in possession of alcohol. I would eventually get a felony case for wrecking my Dad's truck under the influence. My passenger got hurt during the wreck. I ended up receiving a 60 day sentence in the county jail, but the court let me wait until I turned 18 to turn myself in.

I excelled in football, baseball, and track all through high school and there was talk of a football scholarship. My drinking was getting in the way though. I eventually went to Yuba Community College to play football as a walk on. I managed to make the team, but with no parental restrictions I had the freedom to party whenever I wanted. I started drinking on a daily basis at that point, and I eventually quit the football team. At that time, I was introduced to methamphetamine by a friend of mine in the dorms. Again, I loved it the first time I tried it. We began smoking it on the weekends and eventually I could not keep up with my school work. After two semesters, I moved back home with my parents.

Being about 21 years old and living at home with Mom and Dad, I began to drink and use daily. I struggled to hold down a job for more than a month or two and began having trouble with the law. I was beginning to get picked up for numerous drug-related offenses ranging from possession of narcotics to possession of stolen property. When I would get out of jail, the same cycle would continue. I would be in jail thinking that when I get out I was going to do things different this time, and I soon as I was released I would be drinking and using again. This continued for over 10 years. I was never actually offered treatment, although all my arrests were in fact directly related to my drug use.

Things finally changed when in 2002 I was in jail again for a possession charge and I was offered Prop 36. I liked the idea of finally trying to get help. I did not go directly into treatment upon release, as I had to wait almost a month between when I checked in with probation and when I was actually enrolled in treatment. I used methamphetamine the whole time and was fortunate that I did not get arrested on a new charge while I waited to enter treatment. When I finally did enter treatment, I was not the type that “got it” right away. I relapsed three times before I was able to get and remain clean and sober.

When I entered Prop 36 treatment, I was offered direct treatment for my addiction, a medical screening, mental health counseling, 90 days at a sober living transitional house, and referrals for employment. I had needs, like most clients, that exceeded what current treatment provides for. I was homeless and in desperate need of mental health services, as well as housing issues. Without this comprehensive approach to treatment I’m absolutely sure that I would not have made it.

I now have 3 years clean and sober. I am studying social work at California State University, Sacramento. I have been selected to sit on the Sacramento County Co-Occurring Disorder Steering Committee, and have been an active member for 3 months. I have also testified to the legislature several times about Prop 36, now that it is up to our elected officials to set the program's funding level each year.

I have been working as a Prop 36 counselor for a year. In my view, what works is the flexibility of counselors to modify treatment to meet the needs of each individual client. Counselors need to have the resources to offer clients with multiple years of addiction detox and residential services without a 60-day wait, which is what we have now. Most of our clients that are referred to Prop 36 fit these criteria. Some are in the abuse stage and benefit greatly from outpatient counseling alone. However, Prop 36 is unique in the fact that we take most anybody that has a desire for drug treatment. Most of our clients have numerous needs that need to be addressed in order to succeed.

What works is a comprehensive, or an integrated, approach to treatment. As of right now there is a 60-day wait list to get into a residential treatment facility. Many people on my caseload have been picked up by law enforcement or drop out before they've actually even had a chance to detox and begin to engage in treatment. According to NIDA, 40% of people who enter treatment have a co-occurring disorder of some sort. On my caseload, I believe that number could be as high as 60%. NIDA has indicated that this population is 40 percent less likely to succeed without mental health counseling and/or the accompanying psychotropic medication. In my experience, most of our clients have medical, child care, transportation, employment, and housing needs as well.

Treatment works best when you treat the whole person.

As treatment providers, we need to have access to appropriate resources in order to streamline the continuum of care. Treatment is most effective when we have the ability to place people in detox when they finally reach the point of being sick and tired of being sick and tired. Clients continue to fail when there are no residential beds available upon discharge from detox. Many do not have a clean and safe place to return to after residential treatment. Sober Living Houses provide that stable, clean place for people to gain stability in sobriety and start to develop the life skills necessary to succeed.

In summary, treatment works when the resources clients need are provided.