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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **County Surplus Drug Program to Provide Free Medication to Those Who Can't Afford It**

SAN JOSE, CALIF.— Rapidly increasing costs for prescription medications can make it difficult for many people to purchase the medications they need for treatment. In California, an estimated \$10 million worth of unused medications are discarded each year. Today, the County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors approved the implementation of a Surplus Drug Collection and Distribution Program that will collect unused medications and make them available free-of-charge to those who can't afford to pay. The program, expected to launch this summer, will be established as a two-year pilot to evaluate the program's success and potential savings.

At Santa Clara Valley Health & Hospital System, the average cost of brand name prescriptions is approximately \$100 per prescription. "For many seniors and families struggling to pay for rent, food and necessities, the high cost of prescription drugs can be out of reach," said Supervisor Liz Kniss, Chair of the Board's Health and Hospital Committee. "This program will increase access to medication and make good use of a vital health care resource."

In many cases, these medications were prescribed but were never used because the individual no longer needed or no longer wanted to take the medications. The passage of Senate Bill (SB) 798 in 2005 permits counties to collect unused prescription medications that would ordinarily be discarded and donate them to those in need.

All residents enrolled in the county's Ability to Pay Determination (APD) or Valley Care Programs are eligible to receive free pharmaceuticals. The "Ability to Pay" Program requires that individuals be residents of Santa Clara County and have an income of less than 351% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Eligibility for Valley Care requires that individuals have status as either a US citizen or Legal Permanent Resident, have income of less than 201% of the FPL, and be between the ages of 19-64.

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“The Surplus Drug Collection and Distribution Program is one more example of how the county maximizes resources to help people in the community that need it most,” said Robin Roche, Executive Director of Santa Clara Valley Medical Center, Ambulatory and Managed Care.

Pharmacies eligible to receive and distribute medication are limited to those within the Santa Clara Valley Health & Hospital System. The county will work with nursing homes primarily, and will ensure that medication donated meets pharmacy standards. These standards require that medications must be unopened in a tamper-evident packaging and have not been in the possession of a patient or any individual member of the public. Additionally, the medication donated must be on the SCVHHS formulary and have an expiration date of no less than six months. SB 798 medications are reviewed by a pharmacist and require a pharmacist signature. Once medication is approved for dispensing to eligible patients, these medications will be tracked in a central inventory database. Qualified donated medication will be stocked separately from regular inventory.

### **Proper Disposal of Medication**

Recent news about trace amounts of pharmaceuticals in U.S. drinking water raises the question of how individuals can properly dispose of medications. In Santa Clara County, residents may dispose of medications safely through Voluntary Take Back Programs at the Santa Clara County Household Hazardous Waste Program (HHW) and Leiter’s Pharmacy in San Jose. For HHW, appointments must be made online at [www.hhw.org](http://www.hhw.org) or by calling (408) 299-7300. The Voluntary Take Back Programs will not accept any controlled substances such as morphine or vicodin.

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