

# Newsom urges support for March ballot measure to reform California's mental health system

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Gov. Gavin Newsom gathered with city leaders and public safety officials Wednesday to urge support of Proposition 1, an overhaul of the

state's mental health system that will be on California's March 5 primary election ballot.

The measure would reform California's Mental Health Services Act and create a \$6.4-billion bond to provide 10,000 new behavioral-[health](#) beds. The plan would redirect existing funding to expand [substance abuse](#) and mental health services.

"We can't continue to do what we've done," Newsom said at the Los Angeles General Medical Center, where he was joined by mental health workers as well as Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass and L.A. County Sheriff Robert Luna.

"Everything people have been telling us they desperately need and expect of us, we've incorporated into Proposition 1," Newsom said.

The California Legislature, with rare bipartisan support, voted in September to place Newsom's plan on the ballot.

Supporters say the proposition provides desperately needed improvements to the Mental Health Services Act, which voters approved in 2004. The act established a 1% tax on [personal income](#) above \$1 million per year to fund county mental health services.

Proposition 1 would divert 30% of that funding, or about \$1 billion a year, toward supportive housing for people with [severe mental illness](#) or substance use disorders.

Bass said the new funding model would target root causes of homelessness instead of merely treating the symptoms.

"We can get people off the street but you have to address why they were unhoused to begin with," she said Wednesday.

Opponents of the proposition argue it would disrupt the [mental health services](#) already being administered by counties. Californians Against Proposition 1 director Paul Simmons said that he believes the Mental Health Services Act is effective as is, and that building more behavioral-health beds is not the answer.

"I believe it's going to do more harm than good," Simmons said. "They're not building housing for the homeless, they're just locking them up."

The \$1 billion in diverted funds means significantly fewer mental health resources for counties, Simmons said.

Californians largely support Proposition 1, polling shows. According to a December poll by the Public Policy Institute of California, two-thirds of likely voters said they would vote yes on the proposition.

A separate UC Berkeley Institute of Governmental Studies poll co-sponsored by the Los Angeles Times and conducted in November found that 60% of likely voters backed the ballot measure. Only 15% of likely voters had previously heard about the proposal.

As the primary proponent of the ballot measure, Newsom has been working to gather support from a wide range of city and [state officials](#). The governor said the measure, if approved, would allow California to make tangible progress on the homelessness crisis.

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