

## EDITORIAL: It's anyone's guess if Prop. 63 is working



“After 10 years, the state cannot provide basic answers to basic questions: Has homelessness declined? Are programs helping Californians stay at work or in school? Who is being served and who is falling through the cracks?” the state government-run oversight Hoover Commission said in a recent report.

JOHN WALKER — THE FRESNO BEE [Buy Photo](#)

California voters don't readily raise taxes. But because the cause was just, they made an exception in 2004 by authorizing a \$1 billion-plus a year tax to help poor souls who struggle with mental illness.

“Our prisons and jails are full of thousands of people with mental illnesses who would not be there if they had been offered treatment,” Proposition 63's backers said in the official ballot argument. “We should provide care before people end up on the streets, or behind bars.”

So the Little Hoover Commission report this week was beyond disheartening. The report said there is no proof that the \$13.2 billion generated by the Proposition 63-imposed income tax on wealthy Californians during the past decade has done what it set out to do.

“After 10 years, the state cannot provide basic answers to basic questions: Has homelessness declined? Are programs helping Californians stay at work or in school? Who is being served and who is falling through the cracks?” the state government-run oversight commission said.

The report does not break much new ground. The California State Auditor reported in 2013 that the state provided

little assurance of the Mental Health Services Act's effectiveness. The latest report does, however, serve a function by making clear that not much has changed.

Former Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg, the initiative's leading proponent, said Wednesday that data proving the act has worked would be delivered within six weeks. We look forward to it.

In 2004, Proposition 63 backers told voters that by approving the Mental Health Services Act, they would greatly reduce costs for incarceration, medical care, homeless shelters and social service programs.

However, the latest report states the obvious: "Californians still see the mentally ill on their streets and see too often the impacts of mental illness in senseless crimes, suicides and inability to stay in school or on the job.

"Without conclusive data, no one knows how far the state has come in addressing mental illness through the act and how far it still has to go."

Not far enough, evidently. The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation estimates that 28.4% of the inmates in state prison have some sort of mental illness diagnosis.

The commission points out that the Department of Health Care Services and the Mental Health Oversight and Accountability Commission are supposed to monitor how the money is spent. Additionally, the state allocates \$86.9 million from Proposition 63 funds to 12 state agencies to administer aspects of the program. Clearly, many departments claim to oversee parts of the \$1 billion-plus, but no single agency is in charge.

The Little Hoover Commission refers to press reports that money has helped fund acupuncture, art and drama classes, sweat lodges, parenting classes, massage chairs, horseback riding therapy, yoga and anti-bullying programs. The commission does not, however, attempt to determine whether such programs make sense, a disappointment.

Thanks to voters' compassion, California has spent a huge sum to care for severely mentally ill people in the past decade, more than any other state.

Voters deserve a proper accounting of how that \$13.2 billion has been spent. More to the point, the state and counties need to use that money for people who, through no fault of their own, cannot care for themselves.

Copyright

© 2015 www.fresnobee.com and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved. <http://www.fresnobee.com>