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TO: Behavioral Health Advisory Board (BHAB)

FROM: Nadia Privara Brahms, MPA., Acting Director, Behavioral Health Services

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES (BHS) DIRECTOR'S REPORT – August 2025

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT UPDATES

BHS Communication and Engagement Team (C&E) prioritizes continuous engagement with the public through a variety of approaches. These include ongoing outreach facilitated by the BHS Community Request process, BHS Community Health Worker (CHW) services, the Behavioral Health Engagement (BHE) Workgroup pilot, and other stakeholder engagement and input activities. The following outlines how these community engagement efforts are integrated into the department's overall approach, with the aim of informing and promoting access to behavioral health support, services, and education for community members and stakeholders throughout the county.

BHS Community Requests

As part of BHS C&E's community engagement efforts, the BHS Community Request Form, available on the "Connect with BHS" webpage, serves as a central point where community members can connect with services and request in-person engagement from BHS C&E. Through the BHS Community Request process, BHS C&E, including BHS CHWs, regularly engage with community members by participating in local events and hosting informational tables. Informational tables serve as access points for the public to learn about available behavioral health services, ask questions and receive culturally relevant materials.

Additionally, the Community Request process allows community members to request for a behavioral health professional to participate in upcoming community resource fairs and events, as well as deliver presentations tailored to specific groups or organizations. This approach fosters trust, increases behavioral health awareness, and ensures that behavioral health support is visible and accessible where people live, work, and gather. As of June 2025, a total of 193 engagement events were conducted through the BHS Community Request process. Engagement events included 43 presentations and 103 tabling events. Additionally, 38 requests for behavioral health resources and materials were fulfilled. The **BHS Community Request Form** is available on the **Connect with BHS** webpage at the following link: https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/hhsa/programs/bhs/connect/

BHS CHW Services

CHWs offer a range of preventive services delivered through the specialty behavioral health delivery system. As trusted community members, CHWs commonly provide health education, advocacy, and navigation services to support community members in accessing care and resources that address the social drivers of behavioral health. In 2025, BHS CHWs supported outreach and engagement across the region,

resulting in the delivery of 13 presentations promoting behavioral health education and literacy, participation in 127 community resource fairs as tabling exhibitors, and the distribution of materials and resources to 38 organizations. On June 4, 2025, San Diego County's CHW program was highlighted state-wide during a quarterly webinar hosted by the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), Office of Suicide Prevention to promote CHW's critical role in crisis response within the community. CHWs receive ongoing training opportunities to strengthen their engagement skills. Past training has covered several topics including behavioral health programs and community resources, County campaigns, suicide prevention, public speaking, mental health first aid, culturally responsiveness, and more.

Additionally, CHW services continue to be refined to support the dynamic requirements of Behavioral Health Services Act (BHSA) implementation and to advance financial sustainability for CHW services. Below are a variety of pilots in process:

- **Institution of Mental Diseases (IMD) 72-Hour Follow-up:** Specialty-trained CHWs provide follow-up support within the first 72 hours after a client's discharge from inpatient programs at hospitals, helping to ensure continuity in services through tailored support that addresses each client's unique barriers to accessing care.
- **BH-CONNECT Enhanced CHW Services:** Enhanced Community Health Workers (E-CHWs) are unlicensed, trained health educators who provide presentations, education, and assistance to members in navigating systems of care and service delivery lines. E-CHWs address barriers to essential services that support individuals receiving Specialty Mental Health Services (SMHS). Their work focuses on meeting identified Social Determinates of Health (SDOH) needs, such as access to food, housing, transportation, and education which directly impact behavioral health. The services provided by E-CHWs are billable to the state under Medi-Cal.
- **Substance Use and Overdose Prevention Support, Naloxone Distribution:** CHWs will soon begin supporting naloxone distribution as part of their outreach and engagement efforts.

Behavioral Health Engagement (BHE) Workgroups

C&E has made efforts to reach community members through the development of internal County workgroups focused on the development of tools and community offerings that address behavioral health related challenges. These challenges are identified by the public through past engagement efforts. Each workgroup aims to creatively address these challenges by bridging shared experiences, organizing events, and promoting accessible information.

Promoting Behavioral Health Literacy Workgroup

The Promoting Behavioral Health Literacy Workgroup aims to reduce stigma, promote help-seeking behaviors, and ensure access to appropriate resources and support. Since January, the workgroup has worked diligently to plan, coordinate, and implement activities that promote key County services and resources to the community through in-person engagement and digital platforms. Key highlights of the Promoting Behavioral Health Literacy Workgroup are as follows:

- On April 26, 2025, the workgroup orchestrated the NAMIWalks event, reaching community members through a partnership with National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) San Diego and Imperial Counties to stress the importance of mental health as a kickoff to May is Mental Health Matters Month. A host of vendors shared information, activities, and resources reflective of cultivating good mental health. Approximately 2,500 participants were in attendance for the event.
- On May 15, 2025, the workgroup hosted "Let's Talk About…Connecting South Bay to Mental Health Resources" at the Metropolitan Area Advisory Committee on Anti-Poverty of San Diego County, Inc. (MAAC) Community Center in Chula Vista. The event aimed to connect community members and stakeholders with local crisis response services and mental health providers. The event engaged 23 community members and featured seven exhibitors, including both County and community-based providers. In addition, the event included a panel of four speakers representing the San Diego Access and Crisis Line (ACL), Mobile Crisis Response Teams (MCRT), South Bay Community Services (SBCS), and Survivors of Suicide Loss San Diego (SOSL), with a Jewish Family Services Breaking Down Barriers representative serving as moderator. The panel presentation was structured with prepared questions, followed by a Q&A session with attendees, and an interactive activity to discuss and gather input on mental health priorities and community needs.

- In June 2025, the workgroup developed and launched an educational video promoting the 9-8-8 Lifeline and the Access and Crisis Line. The video was widely shared through *Live Well San Diego's* (LWSD) social media channels and is also featured on the BHS San Diego Access & Crisis Line (ACL) webpage. A Spanish-language version of the video is currently in development and is expected to launch summer 2025.

Bolstering Social-Emotional Competence and Wellness Workgroup
The Bolstering Social-Emotional Competence and Wellness Workgroup aims to create a culture of wellness that empowers individuals to navigate life's challenges with confidence and compassion, fostering social-emotional growth, promoting well-being, and resilience. Since January 2025, the workgroup has carried out a range of activities, engaging the community through in-person events as well as social and digital platforms. Key highlights of the Bolstering Social-Emotional Competence and Wellness Workgroup are as follows:

- In January 2025, the workgroup launched new social media content for "Mental Wellness Awareness Month," sharing free resources to support mental wellness and encourage the practice of self-care within the community.
- On April 26, 2025, NAMIWalks served as an opportunity to capture and create video content for the "San Diego Speaks Wellness" project. This project is a compilation video of community voices highlighting how individuals prioritize their mental health and practice self-care. This content will be shared on social media to expand outreach and foster digital engagement.
- In June 2025, the workgroup celebrated the one-year anniversary of the 30-Day Mental Wellness Practice Toolkit by launching its first extension pack focused on youth mental wellness. Created for youth by youth, this toolkit highlights resources and tools that young people can leverage to maintain good mental health, essential for academic success, building relationships, and managing life's challenges. The toolkit is now available on the BHS Youth Mental Wellness Practice webpage at the following link: https://bit.ly/30D-YEP

Preventing Social Isolation and Deaths by Suicide Workgroup
The Preventing Social Isolation and Deaths by Suicide Workgroup aims to increase education, training, and resources to address suicide and social isolation while supporting opportunities for healthy social connections, especially for populations at risk of disconnection. Since January 2025, this workgroup has made progress in reaching community members through two main activities: 1) a social media messaging campaign on self-harm, and 2) the development of a "Hope Box," pilot activity. Key highlights of the Preventing Social Isolation and Deaths by Suicide Workgroup are as follows:

- In March 2025, the Self-Harm Social Media Campaign launched in recognition of Self-Injury Awareness Month to raise awareness about self-harm and reduce stigma. The campaign featured five posts that defined self-harm, shared resources for those who may be struggling, and provided guidance on how to support others. Social media posts were shared throughout the month on Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) Communications and Live Well San Diego (LWSD) social media channels.
- In May 2025, the Hope Box was piloted as an interactive activity to support mental wellness and suicide prevention by guiding participants to create a personalized container with items such as journals, affirmations, and hopeful reminders. First conceptualized in late 2024, the Hope Box was piloted alongside educational presentations with older adults at a senior living facility, demonstrating strong engagement across language and age groups. The model is now being refined for use with different populations and age groups.

Preventing Substance Use, Misuse, and Overdose Deaths Workgroup
The Preventing Substance Use, Misuse, and Overdose Deaths Workgroup focuses on creating strategies and developing projects that reduce substance use and prevent substance overdoses, with a focus on rural, tribal, and high-risk communities. Key highlights of the Preventing Substance Use, Misuse, and Overdose Deaths Workgroup are as follows:

- **Community Engagement & Education**: In April 2025, the workgroup partnered with the Sheriff's Department to host a medication drop-off site during the LWSD North County Community Leadership Team Meeting in observance of Prescription Take-Back Day. That same month, the

workgroup supported a student-led substance use prevention presentation for over 60 middle school peers by providing resources, campaign materials, and onsite staff support.

- **Recovery Storytelling Initiative**: In June 2025, the workgroup launched a pilot "Storytelling Workshop" series to help individuals in recovery share their stories using a strength-based approach. The program included a six-hour participant workshop and a two-day facilitator training for service providers.
- **Creative Engagement Tools**: The workgroup developed "Pay It Forward" postcards, designed as a community event tabling activity where attendees can write and exchange encouraging messages. Cards are distributed to individuals in treatment as a gesture of hope and support.

BHE Workgroups continue to reach new audiences in various ways. This fiscal year, BHS C&E plans to initiate an additional, fifth, workgroup with the aim of reaching and engaging local youth through more concerted efforts.

In May 2025, the staff supporting this endeavor kicked off the "2025 Scoop From You(th) Challenge: Piece of Mind", an initiative inviting youth and young adults, ages 12-25, to raise awareness and use their creativity to help destigmatize mental health. This group has also adapted select BHS resources using the "Own Your Mindset" branding to better resonate with and engage youth. Additional efforts to develop the fifth workgroup are currently underway by identifying members and defining key objectives.

Evolving and Enhancing Stakeholder Engagement

BHS C&E is enhancing opportunities for community members and stakeholders to share their insights and feedback through meaningful, bi-directional communication, ensuring that local programs and investments reflect the needs of diverse populations and align with state Behavioral Health Transformation (BHT) priorities. In preparation, the BHS C&E has actively incorporated discussions into existing tables while establishing new relationships with groups and organizations across the region.

To enhance public awareness of behavioral health priorities, resources, and new engagement activities, BHS C&E has expanded its communication channels, providing various ways for community members and stakeholders to stay informed on upcoming engagement opportunities. Information is shared through the newly launched BHS Engagement Activities webpage, as well as County social media accounts, and County HHSA Community Updates Regional Newsletter. The BHS Engagement Activities webpage is available at the following link: https://bit.ly/BHSEngagement.

To subscribe to the County HHSA Community Updates Regional Newsletter visit the following link: https://bit.ly/HHSARegionalNewsletter

Visit the HHSA Instagram account at the following: @sandiegocountyhhsa
Visit the LWSD Instagram account at the following: @ livewell_sd

Engagement Activities

In collaboration with contracted partners, BHS C&E has conducted a series of input sessions to gather community and stakeholder feedback and help guide specialty mental health and substance use disorder treatment services, priorities, and investments. Key highlights of recent engagement sessions are as follows:

- **System of Care (SoC) Listening Sessions:** February 2025, BHS and UCSD Health Partnership conducted virtual input sessions with stakeholders from the Children, Youth, and Family (CYF) council, Adult, Older Adult (OA) council, and Transitional Aged Youth (TAY) council to refine processes and resources to foster broader community participation, promote better service outcomes, and ways to strengthen stakeholder engagement.
- **Policy and Innovation Center (PIC) Elevate Behavioral Health Workforce Fund Input Sessions:** In April 2025, PIC hosted eight virtual information sessions on contracting opportunities for new behavioral health workforce programs. The sessions highlighted the Nurse Practitioner (NP) Expansion Program, Behavioral Health Apprenticeship Network Program, Peer Support Training Grant Program, Social Work, Counseling, and Therapy Internship Program.

- **NAMI Peer Council Input & Planning Session:** In April 2025, UCSD Health Partnership collaborated with BHS to gather insights from individuals and families receiving specialty behavioral health care on how to meaningfully involve them in upcoming engagement opportunities supporting the County's implementation of BHT initiatives, including BHSA.
- **Youth Optimal Care Pathways (OCP) Sessions:** UCSD Health Partnership collaborated with BHS to host two engagement sessions aimed at gathering input from TAY and inform improvements to services for young people in San Diego County. The first session took place in April 2025 in partnership with the Just Be You and Kickstart Program, followed by a second session in June 2025, in collaboration with the LWSD Youth Sector. These activities were part of a broader engagement effort to explore youth continuum of care, highlight system strengths and areas for improvement, and offer recommendations for building an equitable, responsive, and trustworthy system of care. The feedback gathered will support the development of the County's Youth Optimal Care Pathways.
- **Crisis Response Services Public Messaging Input Sessions**: In April 2025, UCSD Health Partnership collaborated with BHS to conduct virtual sessions reaching communities in the North, South, and East regions of the county. These sessions gathered insights and recommendations to inform future public messaging in San Diego County. The session overview included information on 988 Lifeline, ACL, Crisis Stabilization Units (CSU), and Mobile Crisis Response Teams (MCRT).
- **BHS Housing Council Retreat Listening Session:** In May 2025, UCSD Health Partnership collaborated with BHS to collect initial feedback from Housing Council members to inform upcoming changes to the BHSA housing components. BHS C&E will return to this group in August 2025 to gather additional input for the region's first BHSA Integrated Plan.

Additionally, in May 2025, BHS C&E began building a collaborative relationship with the Southern California Tribal Chairmen's Association, providing foundational information and exploring opportunities for future partnership and engagement. BHS C&E is committed to growing and deepening relationships with this group and other priority populations identified through BHSA planning. The team will continue to conduct listening sessions in the coming months to further incorporate community insights into behavioral health planning and service delivery.

Looking Ahead

Since January 2025, BHS C&E has made significant progress in strengthening connections with the community and key partners through a wide range of outreach efforts, workgroups, and collaborations. Building on these efforts, BHS C&E remains committed to meaningful, community-centered engagement that aligns with BHT priorities and supports the upcoming implementation of BHSA. BHS will continue to expand opportunities for community members and stakeholders to actively contribute to service and program development, with particular emphasis on enhancing youth engagement and culturally responsive strategies. By promoting transparent communication, providing accessible avenues for input, and fostering strong community partnerships, BHS is dedicated to ensuring that programs, resources, and investments effectively address local needs and advance the behavioral health and well-being of all San Diego residents.

BHS SPECIAL EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

16th Annual Early Childhood Mental Health Conference – "We Can't Wait!"

BHS, in partnership with Early Childhood stakeholders, will host the 16th Annual Early Childhood Mental Health Conference – "We Can't Wait!" on September 18-19, 2025. This year's conference, centered on "The Power of Presence: Building a Supportive Environment," will bring together a dynamic blend of nationally and locally recognized experts. These leaders in mental health, education, and social services will explore critical strategies for engaging young children and their families—both in direct clinical work and through broader systemic efforts. The conference will take place in a hybrid format, with the in-person convening being held at the Crowne Plaza San Diego in Mission Valley. Event information and registration is available at the following link: https://ecmh.ce-go.com/ecmh2025/home#

BHS Appointment of Public Conservator for the County of San Diego
Acting BHS Director Nadia Privara Brahms, has designated Urmi Patel, PsyD, MFT to serve as the Public Conservator for the County of San Diego. Dr. Patel received her BA from the University of California, San Diego, her Masters in Marriage and Family Therapy from the University of Southern California, and her doctorate in Clinical Psychology from Alliant International University, Los Angeles. She has been a Licensed Clinical Psychologist since 2008. Dr. Patel is currently the Deputy Director of the Healthcare Oversight Unit at BHS. She brings over 20 years of experience providing direct clinical services and program management to adults living with serious and persistent mental illness along with strategic leadership experience with various public mental health entities, healthcare systems, and digital mental health companies.

No Place Like Home (NPLH) Development Openings from January 2025- June 2025
In 2025, BHS supported the lease-up of two affordable housing developments funded through the No Place Like Home (NPLH) program: Southwest Village Apartments and Vista Santa Fe Senior Village. Southwest Village Apartments, located at 323–338 Willie James Jones Avenue, San Diego, CA 92102, is in District 4 and represented by Supervisor Monica Montgomery. The development leased up in February 2025 and includes 81 total units, with 16 designated as NPLH units. Vista Santa Fe Senior Village, located at 414 N. Santa Fe Avenue, Vista, CA 92083, is in District 5 and represented by Supervisor Jim Desmond. This development leased up in March 2025 and consists of 54 total units, with 25 designated as NPLH units. NPLH units serve individuals with incomes at or below 30% of the Area Median Income and prioritize those experiencing homelessness with a qualifying serious mental illness. Both developments advance the County's commitment to increasing supportive housing opportunities for vulnerable populations.

Presidio Palms Grand Opening
The Presidio Palms Grand Opening took place on June 12, 2025. Presidio Palms is a Homekey development located in the Mission Valley area on Hotel Circle South. The site includes 163 units, two of which are designated for manager and staff use. Construction at the former Extended Stay Hotel was completed last month, and Telecare began moving-in residents on May 27, 2025. The Grand Opening ceremony featured remarks from Mayor Todd Gloria, City Council President and District 1 Representative, the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD), the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Regional Administrator and his Los Angeles team, David Estrella, Director of Housing and Community Development Services, and Tamera Kohler, CEO of the Regional Taskforce on Homelessness. A resident also spoke, sharing his journey to being matched with Presidio Palms and highlighting the support he received from Urban Street Angels and the Alpha Project.

Behavioral Health Bridge Housing (BHBH) and Community Care Expansion-Preservation (CCE-P)
BHS identified a critical need to expand capacity for board and care, licensed adult and senior residential care facilities with a target of increasing available bed days by nearly 150%, equivalent to approximately 450 additional beds. Since March 2024, 221 new board and care slots have been added through the Behavioral Health Bridge Housing (BHBH) grant, representing an 87% increase in Augmented Service Program (ASP) slots as of April 1, 2025. BHS will continue to administer the BHBH grant, which totals approximately $41.5 million and extends through June 30, 2027.

In parallel, BHS has administered the Community Care Expansion-Preservation (CCE-P) grant to help preserve existing licensed board and care homes serving qualified residents and prevent facility closures. CCE-P supports both capital projects, such as infrastructure upgrades, equipment, furnishings, and minor renovations, as well as operating subsidies to help cover essential day-to-day costs, including staffing, utilities, maintenance, and security. In FY 2024–2025, the CCE-P grant has supported nine contractors with approximately $5 million in funding as of June 30, 2025. BHS will continue to administer CCE-P funds, totaling approximately $16.6 million, through June 30, 2029.

Both the BHBH bed expansion and CCE-P efforts focus on serving individuals who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness, receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), or Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants (CAPI), and have a serious mental illness and/or co-occurring substance use disorder.

Respectfully submitted,



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