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October 28, 2025

TO: Behavioral Health Advisory Board (BHAB)

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

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

BHS POPULATION HEALTH UPDATES

Naloxone in San Diego County
Naloxone is a life-saving medication that reverses opioid overdoses and is widely available across San Diego County. In August 2025, nearly 10,000 naloxone kits were distributed through County partners, with ongoing efforts to expand access. Naloxone is widely available at many locations. Community members can call 2-1-1 or visit the BHS website to learn where naloxone is available. For more information on Naloxone in San Diego County, please visit the following BHS webpage: sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/hhsa/programs/bhs/BHS_Harm_Reduction/About_Naloxone.html

Organizations interested in distributing free naloxone and/or fentanyl test strips can register as a Naloxone Distribution Program provider by emailing HarmReduction.HHSA@sdcounty.ca.gov. Groups seeking naloxone training can email HarmReduction.HHSA@sdcounty.ca.gov for more information.

San Diego Relay (SD Relay)
Launched in 2025, the SD Relay Program provides 24/7 behavioral health peer support to bridge emergency departments (EDs) with community-based recovery services. The program engages Medi-Cal–eligible patients referred from EDs after nonfatal overdoses or behavioral health holds, offering immediate connection and 90 days of peer support and navigation following discharge.

Led by certified Peer Support Specialists, SD Relay partners with Scripps Mercy San Diego, Scripps Mercy Chula Vista, and UCSD Health East Campus. Since its launch, the program has received 150 referrals, engaged 138 patients, and distributed 131 harm reduction kits. Early results show improved patient outcomes without disruption to ED operations, while strengthening hospital and community partnerships. Expansion to additional EDs and pursuit of Medi-Cal certification are planned to ensure long-term sustainability.

Medi-Cal Behavioral Health Collaborative
In August 2025, BHS was accepted into Phase 2 of the Medi-Cal Behavioral Health Demonstration Collaborative. This initiative focuses on improving 30-day follow-up after emergency department visits for mental illness (FUM) and substance use (FUA) in partnership with managed care plans. San Diego's team, including BHS, two Managed Care Plans, UCSD, and Strive completed Jump Start sessions and will begin developing a local improvement plan at the October 4-5 convening.

Annual Publications
Publication of annual reports as part of our broad behavioral health initiatives.

- **Cannabis Epidemiology Data Brief – June 2025:** Released in response to the 2024 San Diego County Grand Jury Report, with data on cannabis-related ED visits, hospitalizations, and usage patterns.

- **Substance Use and Overdose Prevention Taskforce (SUOPT) 2025 Report Card – August 2025:** Provides comprehensive data on overdose trends, including mortality, ED visits, and public safety incidents.

- **Binge and Underage Drinking Initiative (BUDI) Report – March 2026:** Summarizes alcohol-related outcomes such as consumption patterns, survey findings, ED visits, hospitalizations, motor vehicle collisions, and mortality.

Ongoing and Completed Initiatives

- **Youth Suicide Crisis Response and Reporting Pilot – June 2025:** Concluded the Youth Suicide Crisis Response and Reporting Pilot, sustaining suicide surveillance processes established during the pilot.

- **Community Leadership Team Data Presentations – June 2025 through October 2025**: Delivered data presentations with Public Health Services (PHS) to Community Leadership Teams to support the development of the Community Health Assessment (CHA)/Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) and BHSA Integrated Plan

- **BHSA Integrated Plan – January 2025 to Present**: Continued to provide data support for the BHSA Integrated Plan.

- **Overdose Surveillance and Response (OSAR) – Ongoing**: Maintained collaboration with PHS on the OSAR Program.

- **Behavioral Health Accountability Set (BHAS) – Ongoing:** Advanced data infrastructure and analytics to support BHAS reporting, including Healthcare Effectiveness and Data Information Set (HEDIS).

BHS DATA SCIENCE UPDATES

The Data Science team at BHS oversees critical data governance functions, serving as a centralized hub for data management – facilitating the acquisition, synthesis, integration, and interpretation of data in collaboration with internal stakeholders and external partners. It supports timely, evidence-based decision-making that informs programmatic, clinical, and operational strategies.

BHS Data Science is comprised of seven focus areas:

1. **Data Acquisition** – Builds rapport and threads with internal and external partners to acquire new data and facilitates the development of data sharing agreements (MOAs, DUAs, etc.).

2. **Data Integration** – Manages data infrastructure and combines data from multiple sources to extract additional value and leverage data as an enterprise asset.

3. **Data Reporting & Analysis** – Develops robust data methodologies, conducts in-depth analyses, and creates interactive dashboards to transform complex behavioral health data into meaningful insights that inform strategic decisions, support service planning, monitor outcomes, and meet local, state, and federal reporting requirements.

4. **Data Training & Engagement** – Designs, develops, and deploys data trainings and resources with the goal of improving data fluency across BHS and promoting increased data usage by addressing challenges, building trust in data, and teaching data skills.

5. **Data Governance** – Leads and drives data governance initiatives across the department to maintain high standards of data compliance and integrity, while identifying and prioritizing data initiatives to align with emerging mandates and the department's strategic goals.

6. **Data Quality** – Enhances existing quality assurance processes to improve data entry accuracy and consistency, while maintaining and refining error management protocols to ensure the timely identification, resolution, and prevention of data quality issues.

7. **Data Policy & Implementation** – Monitors state and federal mandates to identify impacts on data infrastructure and reporting, and coordinates with stakeholders to ensure timely and effective execution of required changes.

The following are updates regarding key bodies of work that BHS Data Science has been engaged in.

Data Governance
BHS Data Science has been leading department-wide data governance efforts, including the development and implementation of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024-25 Data Governance Framework to support coordinated, organization-wide data management. Efforts are grounded in the departmental data strategy, which guides the equitable and effective use of data to optimize the behavioral health continuum. Efforts are also focused on building readiness to identify and prioritize system-wide data needs, with an emphasis on advancing data maturity through improved policy alignment, data quality, access, and standardization. To ensure alignment with system transformation goals, BHS Data Science expanded capacity to monitor existing and emerging policies related to data and infrastructure.

Data Systems and Data Collection: SmartCare
On September 1, 2024, the County of San Diego transitioned from two separate electronic health record (EHR) systems – Cerner Community Behavioral Health (CCBH) for mental health services and San Diego Web Infrastructure for Treatment Services (SanWITS) for substance use services – to a unified EHR system, SmartCare. BHS Data Science continues to play a pivotal role in supporting this transition by assisting with data migration, conducting validation testing, and collaborating with teams across BHS, HHSA, and the broader County enterprise involved in the implementation. A dedicated team has been established to support the resolution of system errors and to guide BHS Programs & Services staff in understanding and leveraging insights from the developed dashboards with a goal of reducing the overall number of errors and supporting providers in addressing those within their control.

Data Systems and Data Collection: Board
Board is the BHS Financial Management System designed to track and manage contract data related to finance, budgeting, and reporting. The BHS Data Science team collaborates closely with BHS Programs & Services and other BHS units to ensure seamless, uninterrupted access to Board. The expanded utilization of Board's capabilities, such as invoice viewing and approval, has enhanced efficiency, reduced resource utilization, and improved data accuracy. These efforts support the County's Transparency and Accountability and Innovation strategic initiatives by promoting fiscal and programmatic integrity through comprehensive reporting, disclosures, and audits, while also applying proven best practices to drive organizational excellence.

Data Systems and Data Collection: Data Collection
Ongoing efforts are focused on streamlining and strengthening data collection and analysis across key programs, including Mobile Crisis Response Team (MCRT) and Psychiatric Emergency Response Team (PERT), to support effective care coordination. As part of this broader work, BHS Data Science also collaborated with the Public Conservator's Office to assess and enhance the Panosoft system, improving its ability to capture required data elements and ensure compliance with Public Conservatorship reporting mandates.

Data Systems and Data Collection: Law Enforcement Collaboration
Efforts continue to further enhance partnerships between BHS and Law Enforcement Agencies around integrating Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) data from Public Safety Access Points. In 2023, BHS Data Science began collecting CAD data for both emergency and non-emergency calls on a quarterly basis. Currently, this effort is in Phase 4, Data Integration.

Phases to Date:

- Phase 1: Establish relationships with all law enforcement jurisdictions
- Phase 2: Receive and analyze sample data
- Phase 3: Establish infrastructure for regular data transmission
- Phase 4: Integrate data

Data Systems and Data Collection: Barriers and Lessons Learned
The extended timeline for Phase 4 reflects the complexity of aligning data from multiple independent systems. Each law enforcement agency uses its own CAD platform, resulting in differences in data structure, formatting, and extraction methods. BHS Data Science must standardize, merge, and transform these varied datasets into a consistent format for analysis. In addition, agencies periodically modify how they transmit data, such as changing field names or file structures, which requires ongoing adjustments to data processing queries. These challenges have reinforced the need for flexible data integration processes and robust communication with partners to ensure smooth, consistent data exchange.

Looking ahead, the initiative will continue to evolve through the following planned phases:

- Phase 5: Expand analytical capabilities and reporting
- Phase 6: Cross-system data exploration (internal)
- Phase 7: Support data-informed collaboration
- Phase 8: Sustain and evolve

Data Systems and Data Collection: Data Lake Initiative
To support HHSA's long-term data strategy and streamline access to cross-departmental data, BHS Data Science has recommended and led efforts for BHS to participate in the County Technology Office's (CTO) enterprise Data Lake environment. This approach leverages established infrastructure to reduce implementation time, and minimize costs associated with building a new system. BHS Data Science has supported this initiative by collaborating with Information Technology Services to define data ingestion priorities, inform governance protocols, and advise on access frameworks. These contributions are helping ensure secure, scalable, and governed access to integrated data that supports operational decision-making, research, and program evaluation. This investment will enable more timely, efficient, and meaningful use of data across programs, improving the department's ability to monitor outcomes and inform policy.

Data Systems and Data Collection: HEDIS Data Oversight and Integration
BHS Data Science oversees the CalMHSA agreement for HEDIS measures, ensuring timely and accurate submission of required data. The team manages the acquisition and integration of multiple data sources, including Monthly Meds Extract File (MMEF), Plan Data Feed (PDF), and Service Claims, into a centralized, analytics-ready repository. This integration supports the development of a dashboard that enables ongoing monitoring and reporting of HEDIS measures, improving accessibility, transparency, and operational decision-making.

Data Analysis
BHS Data Science works collaboratively across multiple initiatives to ensure data-driven decision-making and continuous quality improvement. This work includes supporting the clinical design, implementation, and evaluation of key BHS programs through comprehensive data reporting, analytics, and modeling for a range of critical services, including Long Term Care, the Augmented Services Program, Substance Use Disorder Residential programs, Assertive Community Treatment, and Crisis Residential services. Analysis of utilization patterns, outcomes, and demographic trends ensure services remain responsive to community needs and aligned with evidence-based practices.

BHS Data Science also develops infrastructure and performance measures to guide major policy and system reforms. Current efforts include monitoring Senate Bill 43 (expanding conservatorship criteria), the Community Assistance, Recovery, and Empowerment (CARE) Act – establishing a new civil court process to connect individuals with behavioral health services and housing, and the California Behavioral Health Community-Based Organized Networks of Equitable Care and Treatment (BH-CONNECT), which streamlines access to care through enhanced care coordination and real-time data sharing.

In addition, BHS Data Science is actively supporting the implementation of the Behavioral Health Services Act (BHSA). Key outcomes and reporting deliverables for the BHSA Integrated Plan and the BHSA Budget Template are being developed including utilization data and service projections. To promote alignment and efficiency, there is coordination across project leads, ensuring consistency in planning, reporting, and evaluation. Data-informed proposals and recommendations guide policy, program design, and operational procedures, supporting the transformation of behavioral health under California Advancing and Innovating Medi-Cal (CalAIM) and other reform efforts.

Ongoing priorities include assessing new state and federal policies and regulatory requirements and leveraging data effectively to maintain and improve access, quality, and continuity of care.

Data Training and Engagement (DTE)
In the fall of 2024, DTE completed a departmental Data Fluency survey to establish a baseline for data literacy across the department. This survey will be conducted annually and will guide efforts to promote increased data usage by addressing challenges, building trust in data, and teaching data skills. In FY 2024-25, following the launch of SmartCare, DTE staff began creating report profiles to accompany each newly redeveloped dashboard using SmartCare data, to promote comprehension and ease of navigation. Additionally, DTE staff have hosted monthly office hours for BHS staff to facilitate information-sharing and respond to questions. To further promote data literacy, DTE staff develops resources for understanding BHS' data visualization platform Power BI, a data glossary, and other tools to assist new and existing staff.

BHS SPECIAL EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Upcoming Behavioral Health Services Act (BHSA) Input Sessions
Opportunities to provide input to BHS to support development of the first BHSA Integrated Plan for Fiscal Years 2026-2029 will continue to be held trough Winter 2026. Community members are invited to join upcoming BHSA input sessions, available in both morning and evening options. These sessions, held via Zoom and open to the public, are a chance to share insights and recommendations on important behavioral health topics. Input will help inform specialty mental health and substance use disorder treatment services, priorities, and future investments, and ensure local programming reflects the needs and voices of San Diego County communities.

Upcoming virtual sessions are scheduled at the following dates and times. Additional meeting information and activities are listed online at the BHS Community Engagement webpage: https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/hhsa/programs/bhs/engagement/

- **Crisis Services – Tuesday, November 4, 2025**
  Join an input session to explore how crisis response services can better connect people to care, reduce repeat hospitalizations, and improve safety and stabilization outcomes.
  - **Morning Option:** 10:00 a.m.–11:30 a.m.
  - **Evening Option:** 5:30 p.m.–7:00 p.m.

- **Housing Interventions – Wednesday, November 12, 2025**
  Participate in a discussion on how housing, homelessness prevention, and behavioral health supports intersect — and identify solutions to strengthen community stability.
  - **Morning Option:** 10:00 a.m.–11:30 a.m.
  - **Evening Option:** 5:30 p.m.–7:00 p.m.

- **Substance Use Disorder (SUD) Services – Wednesday, November 19, 2025**
  Held during Substance Abuse Awareness Month, this session will focus on prevention, treatment, and recovery supports that promote wellness and long-term recovery.
  - **Morning Option:** 10:00 a.m.–11:30 a.m.
  - **Evening Option:** 5:30 p.m.–7:00 p.m.

- **Behavioral Health Workforce – Wednesday, December 3, 2025**
  Participate in an input session focused on examining strategies to strengthen the behavioral health workforce — from recruitment and training to retention and employee well-being.
  - **Morning Option:** 10:00 a.m.–11:30 a.m.
  - **Evening Option:** 5:30 p.m.–7:00 p.m.

- **Early Intervention – Tuesday, December 9, 2025**
  Join a discussion on early intervention, prevention, and youth mental wellness ahead of the holiday school breaks.
  - **Morning Option:** 10:00 a.m.–11:30 a.m.
  - **Evening Option:** 5:30 p.m.–7:00 p.m.

Medi-Cal Community Information Sessions
BHS community engagement staff will join HHSA Medical Care Services as they host a series of community information sessions throughout the County about Medi-Cal resources to share information about department resources and solicit input on behavioral health needs and priorities as part of BHA Community Planning Process activities. The sessions will include information about non-specialty and specialty Behavioral Health Services, Enhanced Care Management, and other Community Supports (e.g. housing assistance).

Upcoming community information sessions are scheduled at the following dates, times, and locations. For more information about these efforts, please visit ymcasd.org/medi-cal and/or contact the San Diego Advancing and Innovating Medi-Cal (SDAIM) Team at SDAIM.HHSA@sdcounty.ca.gov.

- **Ronald Reagan Community Center** – Saturday, November 8, 2025, 10:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.
- **Mira Mesa Senior Center** – Saturday, November 22, 2025, 10:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.
- **Virtual Session for Community Members** – Tuesday, December 9, 2025, 6:00 p.m.–7:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Nadia Privara
Digitally signed by Nadia Privara
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