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NADIA PRIVARA BRAHMS, MPA
DIRECTOR

February 5, 2026

TO: Behavioral Health Advisory Board (BHAB)

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

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES (BHS) DIRECTOR'S REPORT – February 2026

BHS Leadership Announcements

Appointment of BHS Director

Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) Ebony Shelton has appointed Nadia Privara Brahms to the position of Behavioral Health Services Director, effective January 9, after serving as the Acting Director since April 2025. She and her team are committed to supporting vulnerable residents with serious mental health and substance use conditions and guiding the department into the future. Nadia started her career with the County in 2005 and joined Behavioral Health Services in 2014, where she led the development of the Optimal Care Pathways models to identify future capacity needs for treatment services locally. She also led the implementation of behavioral health payment reform under Medi-Cal Transformation, guided the development of the new ELEVATE Behavioral Health Workforce Fund to recruit and retain workforce within County-funded behavioral health programs, as well as pursuing more than $430 million in grant funding, with over $175 million of grant funds awarded to BHS over the last four years.

Appointment of Hospital Administrator for the San Diego County Psychiatric Hospital

BHS Director Nadia Privara Brahms has appointed Dorita Sondereker to serve as the Hospital Administrator for the San Diego County Psychiatric Hospital, effective January 9, 2026. Dorita has served as Acting Hospital Administrator since October 2025 and has demonstrated exceptional leadership during this period, fostering positive transformation within SDCPH. Dorita began her tenure with the County in March 2025 as Director of Nursing for the San Diego County Psychiatric Hospital, where she actively engaged in nursing professional development and leadership initiatives. She brings over 40 years of nursing experience, beginning her career in Iowa and later serving in Las Vegas, Nevada. Her clinical background spans behavioral health, burns, critical care, emergency, trauma, and flight nursing.

Programs and Services Updates

Realignment of Clubhouse Contracts

BHS is advancing a strategic redesign of Clubhouse programs to align with the Behavioral Health Services Act (BHSA) and the Behavioral Health Community-Based Organized Networks of Equitable Care and Treatment (BH-CONNECT) policy framework. This initiative reflects a broader commitment to modernizing service delivery, strengthening sustainability, and ensuring equitable access for individuals with serious mental illness across the behavioral health continuum. Impacted providers

have received formal notification from the County, and overall capacity for clubhouse services will be maintained during the transition.

The redesign represents a significant evolution of the evidence-based Clubhouse International model, with a focus on integrating Medi-Cal reimbursement, expanding staffing, and ensuring clubhouse services are accessible for all eligible adults with serious mental illness (SMI) including adults, older adults, and transition-aged youth. These changes align with BHSA and BH-CONNECT requirements and position Clubhouse services for long-term sustainability while improving outcomes and access for those most in need.

Capital & Infrastructure Updates

Community-Based Care (CBC)

The scope of this project includes Adult Residential Facilities (ARF), Recuperative Care, and Residential Care for the Elderly (RCFE). It will provide 81 new beds for our community, including 44 for ARF, 13 for Recuperative Care, and 24 for RCFE. The timeline spans from June 2022 to July 2029, which is approximately 7 years and 2 months. We are currently in the planning and consulting phase, and developer selection will start in late 2025 through July of 2026, followed by design and permitting through end of 2027. These new facilities will offer safe, supportive housing for adults and seniors who need care, strengthening health and stability in our community.

Edgemoor Acute Psychiatric Hospital

Construction is beginning on a 12-bed Acute Psychiatric Hospital at the Edgemoor campus. This $24 million project, supported by Behavioral Health Continuum Infrastructure Program (BHCIP) funding, will renovate a unit within the Edgemoor Distinct Part Skilled Nursing Facility. When completed in 2027, the hospital will significantly expand inpatient psychiatric capacity in East County and serve as a cornerstone for regional behavioral health services.

Children's Crisis Residential Program

The County is also building its first Children's Crisis Residential facility, a 15-bed program in San Diego designed to provide short-term, intensive care for children experiencing behavioral health crises. This project is expected to be completed in fall 2026 and will fill a critical gap in the continuum of care for youth.

Community Outreach & Engagement Updates

BHSA Community Planning Ad-Hoc Subcommittee

To strengthen San Diego County's Community Planning Process (CPP) for BHSA, BHAB has convened an ad-hoc subcommittee for BHSA Community Planning to expand awareness of the Act, inform the local CPP process, and help educate communities about upcoming Public Comment opportunities for the first BHSA Integrated Plan (IP) for 2026–2029. Initial meetings with subcommittee members will be held virtually January-May 2026, leading up to the presentation of the proposed final plan to the Board of Supervisors.

- 30-Day Public Comment Period for 2026-2029 BHSA IP: 03/17/26-04/15/26
- Public Hearing on 2026-2029 BHSA IP with BHAB: 05/07/26, 2:30pm – 5:00pm
- Presentation to the Board of Supervisors is anticipated to be held in May (date to be determined)

Additional presentations/input sessions by BHS staff and partners are anticipated to begin in the spring and will be held concurrently during the 30-Day Public Comment Period to support further community review of the IP. Stakeholders are encouraged to visit the department BHSA webpage for activity dates and times as they become available:
https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/hhsa/programs/bhs/bhsa/.

Workforce Initiatives

Policy and Innovation Center (PIC) Public Behavioral Health Workforce and Retention Fund Administrator- ELEVATE Behavioral Health Workforce Fund
The two ELEVATE Fund program components, the Loan Program and Upskilling, are operational and have the following updates. The Pay It Forward Loan Program began in July 2025 and is currently preparing for the Fall 2026 enrollment period and first program cohort graduates.
The Upskilling Program: There are four programs that are in various stages of award and start-up:

1. Nurse Practitioner Expansion Grant, two current contracts are in negotiations phase.
2. Behavioral Health Apprenticeship Network has one contractor, LAUNCH Apprenticeship Network with San Diego Workforce Partnership with San Diego Imperial Community College Regional Consortium as a sub-contractor.
3. Peer Support Training and Placement Program has two contractors, NAMI San Diego and Pacific Clinics, both have begun enrollment and training.
4. Social Work Therapy and Counseling Internship program has two awardees selected, San Diego Youth Services focused on pediatrics, and National University Health Quality Partners and Vista Hill together will address non-pediatrics.

Medi-Cal Behavioral Health Scholarship Program
The California Department of Health Care Access and Information (HCAI) is offering the Medi-Cal Behavioral Health Scholarship Program as part of the Behavioral Health Community-Based Organized Networks of Equitable Care and Treatment (BH-CONNECT) Workforce Initiative. The purpose of the Medi-Cal Behavioral Health Scholarship Program (MBH-SP) is to provide financial support to individuals pursuing behavioral health degrees or certifications, thereby strengthening the behavioral health workforce across the state.

Under this program, the State will award up to $240,000 in scholarship funding to eligible individuals enrolled in educational programs to become licensed, prescribing behavioral health practitioners. Recipients of this funding will be required to fulfill a four-year service obligation. Individuals enrolled in programs to become non-prescribing licensed practitioners are eligible for up to $180,000 in scholarship funding, also with a four-year service obligation. For individuals pursuing educational programs to become non-prescribing, non-licensed practitioners, scholarship awards of up to $120,000 are available. Service obligations for this category are determined by the award amount: awards of $20,000 or greater require a four-year service obligation; awards between $10,000 and $20,000 require a three-year service obligation; and awards of less than $10,000 require a two-year service obligation. This initiative represents a significant investment in the behavioral health workforce and aims to expand access to care for Medi-Cal beneficiaries throughout California.

Recognition & Achievements

Leadership and Service Recognition
BHS proudly recognizes Dr. Piedad Garcia, BHS Deputy Director, for achieving an extraordinary milestone, 40 years of dedicated service to the County of San Diego. Throughout her distinguished career, Dr. Garcia has been instrumental in shaping the behavioral health system, driving innovation, and advancing equity in care.

Currently overseeing Crisis and Case Management services and serving as the County's Ethnic Services Manager, Dr. Garcia's leadership has left an indelible mark on the department. She has led the expansion of crisis stabilization units across the region and launched mobile crisis response teams that have garnered national and international recognition. Her commitment to elevating the consumer voice led to the creation of peer support programs that transformed service delivery and strengthened community partnerships. Dr. Garcia has also championed housing and employment initiatives, ensuring individuals with behavioral health conditions have access to opportunities that promote

recovery and independence. Her vision and advocacy have paved the way for a more responsive, inclusive, and person-centered behavioral health system—impacting thousands of lives across San Diego County.

Looking Ahead

Building the Upcoming County of San Diego Budget

Each year, the Board of Supervisors sets the County's budget through the Operational Plan, which runs July 1–June 30. The plan covers two years and is a spending plan for the first year and makes recommendations for the second year. The budget shapes priorities that affect your community. Public input matters — your feedback helps guide decisions for Fiscal Year 2026–27. Public comment period will begin May 1, 2026.

Scan the QR code below to learn about the County's budget:

https://youtu.be/r_vlBDgHd28?si=4Ys1aS5bz7a4xyWG

Respectfully,

Nadia Privara

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NADIA PRIVARA BRAHMS, MPA, Director
Behavioral Health Services

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