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September 3, 2026

TO: Behavioral Health Advisory Board (BHAB)

FROM: Jennifer Bransford-Koons, Interim Director, Behavioral Health Services

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

Leadership & Governance Updates

BHS Leadership Transition

The BHS department is undergoing an important leadership transition with the departure of Director Nadia Privara Brahms. During this period, Jennifer Bransford-Koons will serve as Interim Director, bringing decades of experience across the Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA), including leadership roles in Aging & Independence Services and as HHSA Chief Operations Officer. Jennifer will help guide the department through this transition by supporting continuity of operations, moving ongoing priorities forward, and fostering a workplace environment grounded in respect, inclusion, and shared values. A transition plan is underway to maintain stability for staff and the vital services BHS provides.

Programs & Service Delivery Updates

Behavioral Health Community-Based Organized Networks of Equitable Care and Treatment (BH-CONNECT)

San Diego County continues to advance the BH-CONNECT initiative by expanding access to Clubhouse Services as a new Medi-Cal Specialty Mental Health benefit. Clubhouse programs, when accredited by Clubhouse International, represent an evidence-based, recovery-oriented model that promotes community inclusion, skill development, and member empowerment. Working collaboratively with Clubhouse International as the Center of Excellence (COE), San Diego County is leading the state in integrating this proven model of psychosocial rehabilitation, strengthening service consistency, quality oversight, and equitable access for individuals seeking supportive, community-based recovery services.

The Clubhouse model demonstrates a broad range of positive outcomes for members, including reduced psychiatric hospitalizations, increased employment and educational attainment, improved social connectedness, stronger self-esteem, and enhanced overall well-being. Maintaining fidelity to the Clubhouse International Standards ensures that Medi-Cal members receive high-quality psychosocial rehabilitation rooted in meaningful engagement, peer collaboration, and community belonging. This fidelity not only strengthens recovery trajectories but also aligns Clubhouse services with BH-CONNECT expectations, positioning the model as a vital and effective component of the County's continuum of care.

With ten Clubhouse programs operating across the County, BHS has ensured strong systemwide capacity to meet the diverse needs of Medi-Cal members. Under new contracts which began July 1, 2026, Clubhouse services will be available in each of the six (6) Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) regions, with new sites available in the North Central Region, expanded access to services in the South Region, and continuation of longstanding services in the Central Region.

System Capacity, Capital & Infrastructure

Children's Crisis Residential Care Media Event

On August 25, 2026, BHS, in partnership with Child and Family Well-Being and the Department of General Services, held a groundbreaking ceremony marking the start of construction on the new Children's Crisis Residential Care (CCRC) facility in Kearny Mesa at 9400 Ruffin Court, San Diego, CA 92123. The event included remarks from County leadership highlighting the facility's residential mental health services and ongoing efforts to strengthen the region's behavioral health continuum of care for children and youth. The CCRC will offer up to 16 short-term crisis residential beds for youth ages 12-18 with acute mental health needs. Services will be available 24 hours a day on a short-term basis, providing a less restrictive alternative to hospitalization. Services are tailored to each individual and may include crisis intervention, mental health assessment and treatment, medication support, and coordinated transitions to ongoing care.

Update on the Development of the Behavioral Health Wellness Campus

On August 19, 2026, the County of San Diego Board of Supervisors approved actions to advance development of the Behavioral Health Wellness Campus, including receiving an update on the project, establishing appropriations, and applying a California Environmental Quality Act exemption. These actions follow acceptance of a $99.5 million Behavioral Health Continuum Infrastructure Program Round 2 grant. The project will create a centralized, 120,000-square-foot behavioral health treatment campus on approximately 8.24 acres of County-owned property on Rosecrans Street, offering crisis stabilization services, outpatient mental health care, residential mental health treatment, residential substance use disorder treatment, peer-led social rehabilitation services, and related administrative and operational support. The updated total project budget of approximately $240 million reflects expanded treatment capacity requirements set by the State to maximize grant impact and meet regional behavioral health needs. Staff determined that a public-private partnership model is not cost-effective and recommend using a Progressive Design-Build approach to improve collaboration, cost and schedule validation, and compliance with the State's completion deadline in the summer of 2031. The Board's action establishes $22.3 million in additional appropriations for pre-construction activities, affirms a statutory exemption from the California Environmental Quality Act, and advances ongoing development of the Behavioral Health Wellness Campus in alignment with regional priorities for behavioral health access, equity, sustainability, and long-term public infrastructure planning.

Community Engagement, Public Participation & Partner Coordination

Institute of Mental Diseases (IMD) 72 Hour Discharge Follow Up Pilot Program

Three Community Health Workers (CHWs) are currently involved in the Mental Health Institute of Mental Diseases (IMD) Federal Financial Participation (FFP) pilot program, which is an effort intended to follow-up with patients from Sharp Behavioral Health, Alvarado Parkway Institute, and the County's Psychiatric Hospital within 72 hours of discharge. The program aims to connect these discharged patients with additional supports to ensure their continuity of care. On average, this trio weekly supports a range of 40-60 patient referrals from the site facilities. From May to July 2026, the team fielded 1,642 patient referrals. During patient connections, patients have requested support for housing resources, primary care follow-up appointments, connections to County behavioral health clinics/outpatient service information, legal supports offered through Legal Aid Society of San Diego, as well as Enhanced Care Management (ECM) offered through Managed Care Plans (MCPs) to name a few of the types of requests they support.

Ongoing Community Engagement During BHSA Implementation

BHS continues planning for the next phase of its Community Planning Process (CPP) as implementation of the 2026–2029 BHSA Integrated Plan moves forward. Current efforts include refining the approach for four new Behavioral Health Optimal Care Collaboratives (OCCs), drawing on feedback gathered through earlier CPP activities. BHS is also advancing procurements intended to expand future engagement capacity. Together, these efforts are intended to support broader participation, strengthen coordination across

systems, and create meaningful ways for stakeholders to help inform local planning and coordination related to the new statewide population behavioral health goals as BHSA implementation moves forward.

Building on priorities heard most often through CPP activities and public comment, BHS is establishing OCCs focused on:

- **Access, Navigation & Care Pathways** – *making it easier to find, access, and move through the right care as needs change*
- **Family Wellbeing & School Partnerships** – *strengthening how families, schools, and behavioral health partners work together to support children and youth*
- **Housing Stability & Homelessness Prevention** – *improving coordination between behavioral health, housing, and other supports that help people stay stably housed*
- **Recovery, Diversion & Community Integration** – *strengthening recovery, community connection, and pathways that help people avoid unnecessary justice or institutional involvement*

These focus areas reflect recurring themes raised by community members and partners during BHSA planning. The OCCs are intended to create space for sharing information, hearing community and partner perspectives, and discussing ways to strengthen coordination across the behavioral health system. Cross-cutting priorities, including accessible and culturally responsive services and workforce challenges, are intended to be considered across all OCCs rather than limited to a single collaborative. OCC discussions are also expected to include opportunities to consider how experiences may differ across age groups, recognizing that behavioral health service needs, pathways, and available supports can vary across the lifespan.

The OCCs are one part of a broader engagement approach. BHS will continue to share information and gather input through existing stakeholder meetings, community-led spaces, and partnerships with community-based organizations, while also expanding capacity to hear from communities that may face barriers to traditional County-led engagement. Where related regional groups already exist, OCC discussions are intended to connect with and build on that work rather than recreate it.

Several parts of the OCC approach are still being developed. The design is building on feedback gathered through 2025 engagement activities, including the value of meaningful dialogue, focused opportunities for discussion, broader participation across communities and sectors, and clearer connections between community input and broader system planning. More information will be shared as planning moves forward.

Workforce & Capacity-Building Initiatives

BHS Workforce Education and Training

Behavioral Health Services Workforce Education and Training team participated in the Career Exploration Fair held at the County Operations Center to support the Hoover High School Cardinals Interact and Price Fellows program, engaging approximately 120 high school students and providing information on behavioral health career pathways to advance workforce development and promote early awareness of opportunities within the behavioral health sector.

Recognition & Achievements

San Diego County Psychiatric Hospital Employee Engagement

The San Diego County Psychiatric Hospital (SDCPH) is implementing initiatives to strengthen employee engagement and support continuous improvement across hospital operations. These efforts align with broader departmental objectives to enhance workforce experience, reinforce a culture of quality, and promote staff-driven solutions within behavioral health care settings. Current activities include Gemba Walks and staff-led process improvement projects that assess existing workflows and identify opportunities to streamline procedures, improve efficiency, and support high-quality patient care. Additionally, SDCPH has established a staff-led Happy You, Positive Energy (HYPE) committee that provides structured opportunities

for employee connection and wellness. These initiatives contribute to a supportive work environment and encourage staff participation in ongoing improvement efforts.

Looking Ahead

Upcoming Events

Staff will join community members at the following engagements next month:

- **McAlister's 14th Annual Walk for Sobriety**
  Date/Time: September 5, 2026, 8:00 AM
  Location: NTC Park Liberty Station, 2455 Cushing Road, San Diego, CA 92106

- **Interactive Safety Fair for Older Adults**
  Date/Time: September 19, 2026, 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM
  Location: Champagne Village Hall, 8975 Lawrence Welk Drive Escondido, CA 92026

Community members are encouraged to utilize the BHS Community Request Form if seeking out a member of the department to table or participate in an upcoming event/activity. The BHS Community Request Form is available at the following link:
https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/7e7b445a0deb41abbbf8237a3aadf7f2.

2027 Legislative Program

The Office of Economic Development and Government Affairs (EDGA) is leading development of the 2027 Legislative Program, which guides the County of San Diego's year-round advocacy on state and federal legislation. The Legislative Program outlines the Board of Supervisors' policy priorities and supports coordinated efforts on issues affecting regional services, including behavioral health funding, access, workforce development, and system coordination. EDGA is seeking public input to ensure that legislative strategies reflect community needs. The public comment period is open through September 14, 2026, with materials and feedback opportunities available on the Engage San Diego County webpage: https://engage.sandiegocounty.gov/2027-legislative-program.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Bransford-Koons
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