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DIJANA BECK
INTERIM DIRECTOR

November 5, 2026

TO: Behavioral Health Advisory Board (BHAB)

FROM: Dijana Beck, Interim Director, Behavioral Health Services

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

Leadership & Governance Updates

Appointment of Interim BHS Director

Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) Ebony Shelton has appointed Dijana Beck to the position of Interim Behavioral Health Services (BHS) Director, effective October 27, following the announcement of Jennifer Bransford-Koons' retirement. In this role, Dijana will work with the BHS leadership team to ensure continuity of operations during this critical transition while the County conducts a search for a permanent director. She is committed to advancing the department's important work and continuing to strengthen Behavioral Health Services as a standalone department with an expanded role in the community. Dijana brings 25 years of County service to the position, including her recent role as Director of the Office of Homeless Solutions and many years supporting children, families and vulnerable populations. Throughout her County career, she has demonstrated a strong commitment to serving residents and addressing complex community needs. Her extensive leadership experience and dedication to public service position her well to guide the department through this transition and support its continued growth and impact.

Appointment of New Interim Chief Inpatient Operations Officer

Dorita Sondereker, Deputy Director, has been appointed to Interim Assistant Director serves as the new Chief Inpatient Operations Officer for BHS, overseeing inpatient operations for Edgemoor and the San Diego County Psychiatric Hospital (SDCPH). Since joining BHS in March 2025, Dorita has held several key leadership roles, including Director of Nursing and later Hospital Administrator for SDCPH, where she contributed to significant operational improvements and supported progress across inpatient services. Dorita has over 40 years of experience as a nurse, starting in Iowa and then Las Vegas, Nevada. Her experience includes behavioral health, burns, critical care, emergency, trauma, and flight nursing. She has over 20 years of leadership experience, including running the largest emergency department and trauma unit in Las Vegas, Nevada. Her experience and leadership will support continued advancement in this new role.

Programs & Service Delivery Updates

BH-CONNECT Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs)

On July 1, 2026, Behavioral Health Community-Based Organized Networks of Equitable Care and Treatment (BH-CONNECT) transitioned from implementation planning to ongoing operations. BH-CONNECT is a statewide initiative designed to increase access to and strengthen community-based behavioral health services for Medi-Cal members. It focuses on expanding the behavioral health workforce, improving quality of care through evidence-based practices, and enhancing coordination across delivery systems.

Evidence-Based Practice Highlights and Accomplishments:

- **Clubhouses:** BHS is leading the state in integrating this evidence-based, recovery-oriented model that promotes community inclusion into the continuum of behavioral health care. BHS has hosted multiple counties and statewide partners on clubhouse tours, and continues working closely with providers and the Centers of Excellence (COEs) for a successful transition to Medi-Cal. With 10 Clubhouses operating countywide, San Diego has strong capacity to meet the diverse needs of Medi-Cal members.

- **Individual Placement and Support (IPS):** IPS is a benefit for both mental health (MH) and substance use disorder (SUD). BHS has implemented IPS for mental health services through a countywide contract and is on track to be the first California county to expand the supported employment benefit to Drug Medi-Cal Organized Delivery System (DMC-ODS) members, with services expected to begin January 1, 2027. IPS helps individuals with behavioral health needs gain and sustain competitive employment in the field of their choice. It has been linked to improved self-esteem, greater community inclusion, reductions in homelessness, and criminal justice system involvement.

- **Assertive Community Treatment (ACT):** BHS has implemented a countywide bundled rate and amended provider contracts to align with ACT Evidence-Based Practice standards, ensuring consistent, high-fidelity delivery. The ACT model provides intensive, multidisciplinary care for adults living with serious mental illness (SMI) at risk of psychiatric hospitalization, homelessness, or justice involvement. Teams maintain small caseloads and deliver 24/7, field-based services integrating psychiatry, medication management, housing, vocational support, therapy, care coordination, and crisis response. Referrals occur through Optum San Diego Single Point of Access (SPOA) and require prior authorization.

- **Forensic Assertive Community Treatment (FACT):** FACT programs launched July 1, 2026 (with one pending procurement) and expanded staffing to include certified forensic peers. FACT follows the ACT model with specialized support for justice-involved individuals.

- **High Fidelity Wraparound (HFW):** High Fidelity Wraparound delivers intensive, family-centered services aimed at preventing out-of-home placement for children and youth with complex behavioral health needs. San Diego obtained County Plan Approval, demonstrating alignment with the California HFW Standards. Two contracted HFW providers achieved Certification and began providing services under a monthly rate structure utilizing a provisional rate. A Community Leadership Team has been initiated and actively implementing new requirements.

- **Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT):** Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT) is a specialized behavior management intervention for children and their caregivers. A therapist provides caregivers with in-the-moment coaching via a wireless headset while they engage in therapeutic play with their child. PCIT is focused on decreasing child behavior challenges, increasing positive parenting, and improving the caregiver-child relationship through structured interactions. Several local contracted providers are utilizing PCIT and working with the designated COE to ensure compliance with Department of Health Care Services regulations. San Diego held its first PCIT certification training in August 2026, with multiple providers participating.

- **Multisystemic Therapy (MST):** Multisystemic therapy addresses emerging high-risk youth behaviors including criminogenic behavior, anti-social activities, substance use, and other behaviors that may lead to juvenile justice involvement or out-of-home placement. The County established full and partial rates and procured one contract to provide MST countywide.

- **Functional Family Therapy (FFT):** Functional Family Therapy supports adolescents with emerging or escalating behavioral health challenges—such as conduct problems, substance use, and family conflict—by strengthening family relationships and improving communication to reduce risk of deeper system involvement. FFT's structured, short-term model helps families build protective factors, address maladaptive interaction patterns, and stabilize behaviors that could otherwise lead to juvenile justice involvement or out-of-home placement. FFT was launched through the County-operated Next Move program in January 2026 with an FFT Kickoff event which was held in November 2025 with justice partners.

- **Coordinated Specialty Care for First Episode Psychosis (CSC-FEP):** CSC-FEP is a multidisciplinary, community-based model of care that supports individuals from age 12-40 who are experiencing a first episode of psychosis, or clinically high-risk symptoms. This model is the only EBP within the Behavioral Health Services Act (BHSA) that is required for Early Intervention, and its upstream, wraparound approach can significantly impact the illness trajectory to prevent worse health outcomes down the road. BHS is working closely with the San Diego County Office of Education and the local Kickstart program, to align with the state's high-fidelity evidence-based model.

Community Engagement, Public Participation & Partner Coordination

72-hour Patient Discharge Pilot
Community Health Workers (CHWs) are also involved in a pilot program known as the Mental Health Institutions for Mental Diseases (IMD) Federal Financial Participation (FFP) program. The pilot is designed to follow-up with patients from select local hospitals as well as the County's Psychiatric Hospital within 72 hours of discharge. CHWs are tasked to connect these discharged patients with additional supports to ensure their continuity of care. During the first quarter of fiscal year 2026-27 (July through September 2026), CHWs received 678 patient referrals and successfully reached 246 patients through follow-up efforts. Among patients successfully reached, common requests included housing resources, primary care follow-up appointments, connections to County behavioral health clinics and outpatient services, and legal assistance through the Legal Aid Society of San Diego.

Advancing Throughout the Year: Strengthening Collaboration Across the Behavioral Health System
Following stakeholder recommendations for in-person opportunities to support community planning, the department will host an in-person event on November 12, 2026, to convene partners from across the Behavioral Health Services Act (BHSA) populations to learn about San Diego County's behavioral health landscape, identify opportunities to strengthen systems, and participate in upcoming efforts. The event will also provide information to support initial convenings of BHS' new Optimal Care Collaboratives, which will begin recurring meetings in late January 2027 to support community planning coordination and alignment for statewide BHSA outcome goals during 2026-2029 BHSA implementation.

Workforce & Capacity-Building Initiatives

ELEVATE Behavioral Health Workforce Fund
As of October 2026, the ELEVATE Behavioral Health Workforce Fund's San Diego Pay It Forward Loan Program offers 15 eligible degree pathways. Since April 2026, the program has added three eligible training institutions—Point Loma Nazarene University, National University, and the University of San Diego—and 10 additional degree pathways. This expansion broadens access to zero-interest educational loans, giving more aspiring behavioral health professionals opportunities to pursue eligible degrees and helping strengthen San Diego County's behavioral health workforce pipeline.

Behavioral Health Medi-Cal Technical Assistance for Community-Based Organizations
Alongside their subcontractors, Elevation Health Partners and Intrepid Ascent, Altarum Institute is currently working on initial assessments to tailor training and technical assistance services and inform program development through CBO and stakeholder engagement, while establishing reporting that will track CBO

engagement, stakeholder engagement, learning collaborative participation, technical-assistance requests, and progress related to Medi-Cal certification while keeping reporting at an aggregated level. Service activation is currently anticipated to begin early 2027.

Recognition & Achievements

BH-CONNECT Incentive Funding

As part of the BH-CONNECT incentive funding, BHS recently received a perfect score (15 out of 15 possible points) on the 2026 National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA) Behavioral Health Reassessment. This score demonstrates that BHS's strong performance across multiple areas such as timely access, penetration rates, quality management and quality improvement, and population health management, as evaluated by NCQA, who are the industry gold standard for evaluating health plan performance. These high scores resulted in over $9 million in incentive funding which will be reinvested to further advance our progress.

Respectfully submitted,

Dijana Beck
Digitally signed by Dijana Beck
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DIJANA BECK, Interim Director
Behavioral Health Services

c: Ebony N. Shelton, Chief Administrative Officer
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