



# COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

## AGENDA ITEM

### BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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First District

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Second District

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Third District

NATHAN FLETCHER  
Fourth District

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Fifth District

**DATE:** May 2, 2023

**05**

**TO:** Board of Supervisors

### **SUBJECT**

**APPROVE THE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ACT INNOVATION PUBLIC BEHAVIORAL HEALTH WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND RETENTION PROGRAM PROPOSAL AND AUTHORIZE SUBMISSION TO THE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY COMMISSION, ISSUE COMPETITIVE SOLICITATIONS AND AWARD CONTRACTS, AND EXPLORE PARTNERSHIPS TO SUSTAIN THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND RETENTION PROGRAM (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

### **OVERVIEW**

Under the leadership of the San Diego County Board of Supervisors (Board), the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Behavioral Health Services (BHS) continues making strides to advance the transformation of the behavioral health system to a system of regionally distributed services that are accessible to all individuals and families in need. The Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) is a critical resource that provides dedicated ongoing funding to counties to support prevention, early intervention, and treatment services, along with funding for information technology and workforce development and training. MHSA-funded programs serve children, youth, and families, transition age youth, adults, and older adults who are experiencing serious mental illness or serious emotional disturbance, with an emphasis on services accessible to unserved and underserved populations and care that is responsive to cultural and linguistic needs. The MHSA is comprised of five components: Community Services and Supports; Prevention and Early Intervention; Innovation; Workforce Education and Training; and Capital Facilities and Technological Needs.

To address the significant behavioral health workforce challenges that have impacted the region, BHS is proposing a new MHSA Innovation program that would be a first-of-its-kind *Public Behavioral Health Workforce Development and Retention Program* that aligns with several of the strategies outlined in the *Addressing San Diego's Behavioral Health Worker Shortage* report published in August 2022. The proposed Innovation program will offer three new distinct components, including: (a) Outcomes-Based Renewable Training and Tuition Fund, (b) Upskilling to Meet Professional Needs, and (c) Tiered Loan Forgiveness and Home Ownership Incentive. These new approaches will be evaluated for their effectiveness as stand-alone programs as well as their additive benefit when combined with traditional practices.

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Today's action requests the Board approve the MHSA Innovation Public Behavioral Health Workforce Development and Retention Program proposal and following the required 30-day public comment period, submit the Innovation proposal to the California Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission (MHSOAC) for approval. Additionally, today's action requests the Board authorize competitive solicitations to implement the MHSA Innovation Public Behavioral Health Workforce Development and Retention Program, contingent on approval by the MHSOAC. Finally, today's action requests the Board to authorize the Agency Director, Health and Human Services Agency or designee to explore partnerships and other opportunities to leverage additional funding and resources to sustain the proposed program.

Today's actions support the County of San Diego's vision of a just, sustainable, and resilient future for all, specifically those communities and populations in San Diego County that have been historically left behind, as well as our ongoing commitment to the regional *Live Well San Diego* vision of healthy, safe, and thriving communities. This will be accomplished by creating an innovative program to address an unmet need within the San Diego County region by recruiting, training, and retaining a diverse public behavioral health workforce.

**RECOMMENDATION(S)**

**CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER**

1. Approve the Mental Health Services Act Innovation Public Behavioral Health Workforce Development and Retention Program proposal including: (a) Outcomes-Based Renewable Training and Tuition Fund; (b) Upskilling to Meet Professional Needs Program; and (c) Tiered Loan Forgiveness and Home Ownership Incentive Program, and authorize the Agency Director, Health and Human Services Agency to submit the proposal to the Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission (MHSOAC) for approval.
2. In accordance with Board Policy A-87, Competitive Procurement, and Administrative Code Section 401, authorize the Director, Department of Purchasing and Contracting, to issue competitive solicitations for the implementation of the Public Behavioral Health Workforce Development and Retention Program, and upon successful negotiations and determination of a fair and reasonable price, award one or more contracts for an initial term of up to one year, with four option years, and up to an additional six months, if needed; and to amend the contracts to reflect changes in program, funding or service requirements, subject to the availability of funds and the approval of the Agency Director, Health and Human Services Agency, contingent upon approval by the MHSOAC and the availability of funds.
3. Authorize the Agency Director, Health and Human Services Agency or designee to explore partnerships and other opportunities with public and private entities to leverage additional funding and resources to expand and sustain the Behavioral Health Workforce Development and Retention Program.

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**EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

The vision of the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) is to build a system in which mental health services are equitable and accessible to all individuals and families within the region who are experiencing serious mental illness or serious emotional disturbance. According to the 2021 California Health Interview Survey conducted by the University of California Los Angeles in 2021, 10 percent of San Diegans reported experiencing serious psychological distress in the past month. However, residents living below 200% of the federal poverty level, those who reported a history of incarceration, or who identified as black, Hispanic/Latino, or multiracial, reported higher percentages of serious psychological distress compared to others.

The County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Behavioral Health Services serves a diverse population of all ages, but especially those disproportionately impacted by serious mental illness or serious emotional disturbance, including black, indigenous and people of color, individuals experiencing homelessness, children who are commercially sexually exploited, children and adults with justice involvement, people with complex behavioral health needs, and individuals in at-risk age groups. The MHSA Innovation Public Behavioral Health Workforce Development and Retention Program proposal makes substantial investments toward equitable workforce recruitment, development, and retention to build a behavioral health workforce that is culturally competent, linguistically diverse, and reflects the diversity of the populations being served.

**SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) programs provide services to children, youth, and families, transition age youth, adults, and older adults in a community-centric approach while taking into consideration language and cultural barriers to ensure equitable access for those in need of behavioral health services. The MHSA Innovation Public Behavioral Health Workforce Development and Retention Program will make substantial enhancements to the recruitment, development, and retention of the behavioral health workforce. Specifically, this item supports the County of San Diego’s (County) Sustainability Goal #1 of engaging the community in meaningful ways by ensuring that community voices are heard in the development of this program. This will be accomplished by offering a 30-day public comment period, during which the public can provide feedback on the proposal. Additionally, this item supports the County’s Sustainability Goal #4 of protecting the health and well-being of everyone in the region by ensuring a culturally competent and linguistically diverse workforce that reflects the diversity of the populations being served.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

Funds for this request are included in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023-25 CAO Recommended Operational Plan in the Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA). If approved, this request will result in estimated costs and revenues of approximately \$0.5 million in FY 2023-24, and an

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estimated costs and revenues of \$15.0 million in FY 2024-25. The funding source is the Mental Health Services Act. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years. To ensure sustainability of these programs, HHSa will explore and initiate partnerships, grants, and other opportunities with public and private entities to leverage additional resources.

**BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT**

N/A

**ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT**

This item was announced to the Behavioral Health Advisory Board (BHAB) on April 6, 2023, following the commencement of the 30-day public comment period that began on April 4, 2023. The Innovation proposal will also be presented to BHAB on May 4, 2023, which marks the conclusion of the 30-day public comment period.

**BACKGROUND**

Under the leadership of the San Diego County Board of Supervisors (Board), the County of San Diego (County) Health and Human Services Agency, Behavioral Health Services (BHS) continues making strides to advance the transformation of the behavioral health system to a system of regionally distributed services that are accessible to all individuals and families in need. The Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) is a critical resource that provides dedicated ongoing funding to counties to support prevention, early intervention, and treatment services, along with funding for information technology and workforce development and training.

MHSA-funded programs serve children, youth, and families, transition age youth, adults, and older adults who are experiencing serious mental illness or serious emotional disturbance, with an emphasis on services accessible to unserved and underserved populations and care that is responsive to cultural and linguistic needs. The MHSA is comprised of five components: Community Services and Supports; Prevention and Early Intervention; Innovation; Workforce Education and Training; and Capital Facilities and Technological Needs.

As required by the California Code of Regulations, five percent of the total MHSA funding allocated to counties must be utilized for Innovation (INN) programs. The MHSA INN funding is received annually, and counties must expend the funds within three fiscal years of receipt to avoid reverting the funds back to the State. MHSA INN programs must follow specific regulations and conclude within a specified timeframe of no more than five years, at which point a county must evaluate and determine whether to continue the program under another MHSA funding component and/or other behavioral health funding source, if deemed successful.

In August 2022, the report titled *Addressing San Diego's Behavioral Health Worker Shortage*, outlined specific workforce needs throughout the public behavioral health system in San Diego

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County across eleven behavioral health professions. The report specified the need to recruit 8,100 additional professionals into the region's behavioral health workforce to meet existing needs, an additional 7,800 to replace individuals leaving over the next five years due to various factors, and 2,600 more to meet growth anticipated by 2027. In total, starting from the nearly 17,000 workers in the field today, the San Diego region needs to educate, train, attract, employ, and retain 18,500 new professionals between 2022 and 2027, a staggering increase of approximately 110 percent across the existing behavioral health workforce.

A key strategy to address this need is establishing a regional workforce training fund to support recruitment, training, and education systems for workers inclusive of scholarships, stipends, in-school support, loan forgiveness, and other incentives for public service. The County BHS is proposing a new MHSA INN program that would be a first-of-its-kind *Public Behavioral Health Workforce Development and Retention Program* that aligns with the recommendations outlined in the August 2022 report. The County's proposed MHSA INN program will offer three new distinct components, including:

- a) Outcomes-Based Renewable Training and Tuition Fund;
- b) Upskilling to Meet Professional Needs Program; and
- c) Tiered Loan Forgiveness and Home Ownership Incentive Program.

The proposed MHSA INN program will implement a combination of professional development programs and new strategies tailored to the San Diego County's most pressing workforce needs. These new approaches will be evaluated for their effectiveness as stand-alone programs as well as their additive benefit when combined with traditional practices. The County will engage an administrator(s) to develop criteria, administer the components, and optimize the program to ensure its sustainability, and as required by MHSA INN, establish formal evaluation to ensure the program achieves the necessary outcomes.

#### *Outcomes-Based Renewable Training and Tuition Fund*

The Outcomes-Based Renewable Training Fund will provide 0% interest loans, as well as upfront financing to students completing behavioral health clinical training and supervision programs. Payback terms would initiate once students have secured employment in a County behavioral health position earning approximately \$50,000 or more annually and would likely be capped at five years. Following employment for a duration of five years, regardless of the remaining balance, the loan will be forgiven if staff remain in the public behavioral workforce. It is anticipated that approximately 1,900 behavioral health professionals will receive assistance over the term of the program. All loan repayments would be reinvested into the fund to support future student loan recipients.

Similar outcomes-based funds have been established in technology and business intelligence sectors, both nationally and within San Diego County, where a near-term infusion of skilled

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labor was needed to support these fast-growing industries. The pace of growth needed in behavioral health rivals that of such private sectors.

#### *Upskilling to Meet Professional Need*

The Upskilling to Meet Professional Need component of the proposed INN program will be designed to train County and County-contracted behavioral health workers in the region's most urgently needed professional fields to achieve licensure and/or certification, which may include and is not limited to:

- Community Behavioral Health Workers (CBHW)
- Peer Support Specialists
- Substance Use Disorder (SUD) Counselors
- Licensed Behavioral Health Clinicians
- Psychiatric Nurses

For CBHWs and SUD Counselors, upskilling will take the form of apprenticeship programs. The CBHW apprenticeship will leverage experiences of existing CHW apprenticeship programs and apply those experiences to engage a diverse candidate pool, focused on individuals with lived experience. The SUD counselor apprenticeship will build on the varied experiences of Rhode Island and Washington-based programs, tailored to the requirements of the California Department of Health Care Services Counselor Certification Program, and will focus on cultural and linguistic competency needs of the San Diego County population.

To help retain the existing County public behavioral health workforce, the upskilling program would offer scholarships to current members of the County and County-contracted public behavioral health workforce. This program strives to develop and retain this essential workforce by supporting them in achieving certification and/or licensure to advance their careers and increase their income potential while helping fill a significant and critical need.

Lastly, two additional upskilling programs will focus on expanding and specializing the nursing workforce in the psychiatric field. The first applies the successful principles practiced at the University of California Berkeley Master of Social Work program to establish behavioral health clinical slots for registered nurse students. The second establishes a Doctor of Nursing Practice program with specialization in psychiatry at local universities that may include, but will not be limited to, California State University San Marcos, San Diego State University, University of California San Diego, and/or University of San Diego. It is anticipated that approximately 750 behavioral health professionals will benefit from this new program.

#### *Tiered Loan Forgiveness and Home Ownership Incentive Program*

For behavioral health workers, the Tiered Loan Forgiveness and Home Ownership Incentive Program would establish an incentive for County staff to live and work in San Diego County. By

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staggering the home ownership incentive to initiate at completion of the loan forgiveness program, the County will evaluate the degree to which this package can extend the tenure of County's behavioral health workforce both in behavioral health field and as members of San Diego County communities. It is anticipated that approximately 250 County behavioral health professionals will benefit from this program over the term of five years.

#### *Evaluation*

In order to quantify the success of various workforce development models in attracting and retaining public behavioral health workers within San Diego County, the County, in partnership with contractors, will undertake a comprehensive program evaluation of both quantitative and qualitative data collected throughout the program. As outlined in Attachment A, these efforts will also enable the County to understand the relative return on investment of various workforce development models to inform future workforce program development.

The recruitment pace and specialization required to meet the behavioral health needs within San Diego County will require bold, innovative, and multi-faceted approaches to yield successful outcomes. The proposed approaches have been successfully applied in technology and business sectors, as well as medical specialties, where an influx of skilled labor was needed to support high-growth areas. Both the surge in demand for behavioral health services and market dynamics straining the behavioral health workforce supply mirror the challenges experienced in such outside industries. Additionally, to ensure sustainability of the component outlined in the MHSA INN proposal, the Health and Human Services Agency will explore and initiate partnerships, grants, and other opportunities with public and private entities to leverage additional resources.

Today's action requests the Board approve the MHSA INN Public Behavioral Health Workforce Development and Retention Program proposal and following the required 30-day public comment period, submit the Innovation proposal to MHSOAC for approval. Additionally, today's action requests the Board authorize competitive solicitations to implement the Public Behavioral Health Workforce Development and Retention Program, contingent on approval by MHSOAC. Finally, today's action requests the Board authorize the Agency Director, Health and Human Services Agency or designee to explore partnerships and other opportunities to leverage additional funding and resources to sustain the program.

This proposed MHSA INN program will implement strategies and incentives to address an unmet need within the region by recruiting, training, and retaining a diverse public behavioral health workforce. The County anticipates engaging with various stakeholders and impacted employee unions in accordance with the County's meet and confer process as the three components of the program are fully developed. In doing so, the Health and Human Services Agency will return to the Board and/or the MHSOAC for approval, if necessary, should there be any significant shifts in scope and/or funding. The County remains committed to optimizing

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available financial resources to support behavioral health services and workforce to meet the increasing demand of the community, which has been exacerbated due to stressors post COVID-19 pandemic, the opioid crisis, economic uncertainty, and other factors. BHS continues extensive planning efforts to ensure MHSAs programs are sustainable and minimally impacted when large swings in MHSAs revenue projections occur.

**LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN**

Today's proposed action supports the County of San Diego's (County) 2023-2028 Strategic Plan Initiatives of Equity (Health) and Community (Quality of Life) as well as the regional *Live Well San Diego* vision, by building programs and incentives that attract the critical behavioral health workforce needed to support the provision of quality care for vulnerable and underrepresented communities.

Respectfully submitted,



HELEN N. ROBBINS-MEYER  
Interim Chief Administrative Officer

**ATTACHMENT(S)**

Attachment A – Mental Health Services Oversight & Accountability Commission Innovative Project Plan Proposal for Public Input