



County of San Diego

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TO: Behavioral Health Advisory Board (BHAB)

FROM: Luke Bergmann, Ph.D., Director, Behavioral Health Services

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES (BHS) DIRECTOR'S REPORT – DECEMBER 2023

BHS 2023 YEAR IN REVIEW

This calendar year saw an incredible advancement of critical services and initiatives in BHS, moving us closer to realizing the vision of transforming the behavioral health system of care in San Diego County. Below are just a few notable initiatives that highlight continued advancements to address behavioral health workforce challenges, long term care needs, prevention efforts, supporting connections to care, and creating opportunities for stakeholder and community engagement to inform BHS programs and services.

Behavioral Health Workforce

In the face of continued workforce challenges, BHS is advancing strategies which will support the long-term recruitment and retention of a qualified behavioral health workforce. In January, **BHS accepted \$0.8 million in worker retention payment funding** for eligible workers and physicians at the San Diego County Psychiatric Hospital and Edgemoor Distinct Part Skilled Nursing Facility and retention payments were subsequently issued to eligible staff.

In April and August, BHS reported updates to the Board of Supervisors (Board) on recommended strategies to address the behavioral health workforce challenges in San Diego County which included plans to: 1) invest in competitive compensation; 2) pursue administrative relief; 3) establish regional behavioral health training centers of excellence; 4) build a workforce training fund; and 5) maintain a feedback loop with workers to solicit feedback.

On May 2, 2023 (5) the **Public Behavioral Health Workforce Innovation Program** proposal was approved by the San Diego County Board of Supervisors, and subsequently, on June 15, 2023, the California Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission approved up to \$75 million in Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) Innovation funding over five years for the training and tuition-reimbursement program and the upskilling to meet professional needs components. Planning for implementation of this new program is underway.

BHS continues to pursue opportunities to recruit and sustain a qualified public behavioral health workforce including implementation of the programs above. Additionally, in the past year, BHS has moved forward with several key phases of implementing **California Advancing and Innovating Medicaid (CalAIM) behavioral health payment and documentation reform**, including conversion of contracts from cost-reimbursement structures to a fee-for-service structure; these major system

changes provide new opportunities to reduce the administrative burden experienced by public behavioral health providers as well as invest in the behavioral health workforce.

Long-Term and Community-Based Care

To advance the **BHS Optimal Care Pathways (OCP) model**, which includes rebalancing services and adding capacity within subacute and community-based care, BHS pursued critical funding opportunities in 2023 which will support the implementation of these recommendations.

To date, BHS has accepted a total of \$15.8 million in **Community Care Expansion (CCE) program** funds, which is a portion of the \$805 million state allocation for the preservation and expansion of adult and senior care facilities. Additionally, BHS was awarded \$44.3 million from the state **Behavioral Health Bridge Housing Program** to help address the gaps in Board and Care beds devoted to clients with public insurance by providing operational and supportive services funding to expand bridge housing capacity within current or new settings by optimizing utilization of existing services in the community. BHS is working with the grant administrator to execute performance agreements to receive the funding.

Additionally, work continues to reimagine the array of services within the **San Diego County Psychiatric Hospital (SDCPH)**, an Institution of Mental Disease (IMD) facility, potentially creating opportunities for BHS to address pressing post-acute care needs within the continuum, as well as realize operational efficiencies. Planning is underway for this effort.

BHS continues to pursue funding opportunities that support advancing the vision of the OCP model.

Prevention

BHS remains committed to focused prevention efforts and community-informed public outreach and education initiatives. Over the past year, BHS has presented to the Board two comprehensive updates on the implementation of the **Opioid Settlement Framework** (Framework), which outlines the County of San Diego's (County) approach to spending allocated funds from opioid pharmaceutical settlement agreements. In May, BHS shared the harm reduction outreach and education campaigns that launched, including a media campaign to prevent fentanyl overdoses among youth, and obtained approval to expand public outreach efforts through the procurement of new contracts. In October, BHS returned to the Board to present updates on the Framework which included a comprehensive review of all prevention efforts and new programs which collectively advance the County's Comprehensive Harm Reduction Strategy.

In June, BHS received approval to accept grant funding from the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) for the **Youth Suicide Crisis Response and Reporting Pilot** program. Approximately \$4.1 million of one-time funds was allocated to San Diego County to enhance efforts to address suicide among youth aged 12-25 years. The pilot will run through June 2025.

In recognition of Suicide Prevention Month in September, BHS developed a **Suicide Prevention Toolkit** in English and Spanish designed to foster hope and action in destigmatizing conversations about suicide. This year's campaign, *Sharing Hope Together*, offered downloadable and shareable content such as social media posts, resource guides, activity worksheets, and more for each day of National Suicide Prevention Week. The Suicide Prevention Toolkit can be found at the following link: https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/hhsa/programs/bhs/suicide_prevention.html.

Connections to Care

Over the last five years, BHS has shared a vision to establish regionally distributed behavioral health services that offer multiple, low barrier connections to care that are close to a person's network of support. Key efforts in 2023 continued to advance this vision including an action in June that authorized acceptance of a \$4.5 million grant award to further enhance the **Mobile Crisis Response Team (MCRT)** program. MCRT was designed to help people who are experiencing a mental health or substance use crisis by dispatching behavioral health experts to emergency calls instead of law

enforcement, when appropriate. Since the January 2021 program inception, MCRT has responded to over 8,000 referrals (as of 11/1/23). MCRT and BHS staff are currently in the planning and development phase of MCRT expansion and integration with Fire/Emergency Medical Services, Tribal leadership, colleges and universities, and school districts.

In October, the County, along with other key partners involved in the process, launched the much-anticipated **Community Assistance, Recovery and Empowerment (CARE) Act program** which creates a new pathway to deliver mental health and substance use services to individuals who are diagnosed with schizophrenia or other psychotic disorders and are not engaged in treatment. Prior to and through the launch, BHS has onboarded an entire team of new clinical County staff, along with administrative staff, across various units to support the CARE Act program implementation. Throughout December and into January 2024, BHS and NAMI will lead a series of six community information sessions on the CARE Act Program to provide the community the opportunity to become better informed about the CARE Act and obtain resources. For more information, please visit the BHS webpage: www.SanDiegoCounty.gov/CAREAct.

Also in October, the County received approval to partner with the Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians (Viejas) for the provision of approximately 150 new opioid treatment program slots at the **Revive Pathway clinic**, located in El Cajon, and wholly owned by Viejas. Services include medication assisted treatment, which reduces drug use, disease rates, and overdose events, as well as promoting recovery among people with substance use conditions. This adds critical capacity in a region that has a proportionally high rate of opioid overdose deaths and opioid related emergency department visits and, as a Tribal Compact Clinic, will have the added benefit of specializing in care for the American Indian and Alaska Native community.

In terms of capital infrastructure, throughout 2023, BHS and the County's Department of General Services (DGS) made significant progress on two major capital projects.

- In January, BHS began announcing plans for the construction of a new **East Region Crisis Stabilization Unit (CSU) and Recovery Bridge Center (RBC)**. By May, BHS initiated community outreach efforts to inform and engage in dialogue with the community about this project.
- In partnership with Tri-City Healthcare District (Tri-City), BHS and DGS continued progress on a new state-of-the-art **Psychiatric Health Facility (PHF)** on the Tri-City campus in Oceanside to provide essential mental health services to meet the needs of those living in North San Diego County. Significant construction milestones in 2023 include framing of the building, completion of electrical and plumbing systems, and roof installation. The project is on track to be operational in summer 2024.
- Planning continues for the **Edgemoor Psychiatric Acute Inpatient Unit**, which will establish 12 new inpatient beds in the East Region of San Diego County. BHS received Behavioral Health Continuum Infrastructure Program grant funding from the State totaling \$16.7 million.

Community Engagement

Throughout this past year, creating opportunities for community and stakeholder input has been a key focus for the department. Input has been gathered through various mechanisms, including key informant interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, and in-person and virtual listening sessions. Stakeholder input was elevated through Board Letters, Board Memos, and presentations provided by BHS to the Board. Additionally, stakeholder input specific to BHS health promotion activities and how community engagement is conducted was received by the department's **Communication and Engagement (C&E) Team** and continues to inform engagement strategies.

Community engagement for the **East Region CSU/RBC** aimed to raise community awareness about the project and services, provide opportunities for community residents and stakeholders to engage in conversation with County staff, identify champions supportive of this project, and ensure that outreach

was wide reaching to a myriad of diverse stakeholders including community partners, elected officials, and East County residents. As of November, 813 stakeholders have been reached through our community engagement efforts related to this project, in partnership with our community engagement contractor. Community outreach and engagement will continue throughout the development of the project with continued dialogue with the community.

Community engagement strategies this year have also leveraged existing regional partners; expanded networks throughout the county, including in Tribal and rural communities; and created more opportunities and methods by which community input can be gathered to inform behavioral health service needs in the region. The C&E Team will continue to explore establishing more mechanisms by which to gather and thread community input to inform BHS programs and services. The C&E Team will also look to new County platforms like Engage San Diego (<https://engage.sandiegocounty.gov>) to increase opportunities for community input that provides insight on the most pressing issues related to mental health and substance use and how BHS can address these challenges by meeting people where they are.

BHS 2024 Looking Ahead

As we look to the new year, several large-scale policy changes will significantly impact the system of care, including the implementation of **Senate Bill (SB) 43**, which was signed by the Governor on October 10, 2023. Unless delayed through a resolution by the Board, implementation will begin on January 1, 2024. SB 43 significantly updates California's conservatorship laws for the first time in more than 50 years to include people who are unable to provide for their personal safety or necessary medical care, in addition to food, clothing, or shelter, due to either severe substance use disorder or serious mental health illnesses.

On October 12, 2023, the Governor signed **SB 326, the Behavioral Health Services Act (BHSA)**, which seeks to modernize the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA). BHSA will shift the scope of services funded previously by MHSA, with shifts anticipated to services, increased accountability, improved outcome reporting, and a broadened focus that requires reporting on all funding sources supporting behavioral health services.

Assembly Bill (AB) 531, the Behavioral Health Infrastructure Bond Act of 2023, was also signed by the Governor on October 12, 2023, and would authorize the issuance of bonds totaling \$6.38 billion to finance loans or grants for the acquisition of capital assets for the conversion, rehabilitation, or new construction of permanent supportive housing people who are homeless and meet specific criteria. The bond funding will be used to construct, acquire, and rehabilitate new treatment beds and supportive housing units and treatment slots. These two measures will go to California voters in March 2024 as Proposition 1.

On October 13, 2023, **SB 525, Minimum Wages for Health Care Workers**, was signed by the Governor. The bill establishes a new minimum wage requirement for health care workers beginning on June 1, 2024, inclusive of employees working in skilled nursing facilities, acute care hospitals, board and care facilities, and other behavioral health settings. Planning is underway to determine the impact of the bill, which is anticipated to impact behavioral health workers across the public behavioral health system.

Finally, as noted above, **Behavioral Health Payment Reform** implementation under CalAIM began on July 1, 2023, and is currently underway using a phased approach. CalAIM is anticipated to transform and modernize the state's Medicaid program to improve the quality of life and health outcomes of Medi-Cal beneficiaries, including those with the most complex health and social needs. CalAIM includes a series of far-reaching initiatives that together represent broad reforms of Medi-Cal programs and systems. Key transitions for payment reform will include:

- Shift from cost-reimbursement methodology to a fee for service (FFS) payment structure
- Shift to Intergovernmental Transfers

- Shift from Healthcare Common Procedure Coding System (HCPCS) to a combination of HCPCS and Common Procedural Terminology (CPT) coding

More information about Behavioral Health Payment Reform can be found at the following link: <https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/hhsa/programs/bhs/calaim.html>.

BHS 2023 SPECIAL EVENTS & ACHIEVEMENTS

Below are a few noteworthy events and achievements from this past year and are not intended to be all inclusive.

On April 20, 2023, the County celebrated the phase one **grand opening of the newly reconstructed Villa Serena**, an affordable housing community in San Marcos. This project was funded in part by the BHS Special Needs Housing Program which allows the County to utilize MHSAs funds for supportive housing. Of the 85 units available in phase one (1), eight (8) will be designated for clients with behavioral health needs who will receive mental health and medication support, assistance applying for benefits and managing daily living activities, and access to other supportive services.

During the annual Salute to Healthcare Heroes Award Ceremony the San Diego Business Journal awarded the category of **Outstanding Behavioral Health Program to the Community Harm Reduction Team (C-HRT)**. C-HRT is a collaboration with Episcopal Community Services for the C-HRT designated Safe Haven and Family Health Centers of San Diego, which operates the C-HRT street outreach component. This is a joint effort between BHS, the City of San Diego, and San Diego Housing Commission. The program provides San Diegans experiencing substance use conditions, co-occurring mental health issues, and homelessness with connections to interim shelter options, case management, system navigation, permanent housing, behavioral health services, and medical care. Since C-HRT launched in November 2021, the outreach team have made over 1,700 street contacts and have engaged more than 300 individuals with case management services and connections to housing options.

More information on the Salute to Healthcare Heroes Award can be found at the following link: <https://images.sdbj.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Healthcare-Heroes-2023.pdf>.

In honor of National Recovery Month, BHS held the 33rd annual **National Recovery Month celebration** event on Saturday, August 26, 2023, at Waterfront Park. BHS welcomed approximately 250 attendees to *Celebrate the Tides of Hope*. The event featured 70 exhibitors engaging visitors in a variety of educational activities and resources, including distribution of 400 life-saving Naloxone kits. Attendees shared their gratitude for the invaluable resources and Naloxone availability, alongside a deepened understanding of the recovery community.

In September, **Edgemoor was named one of Newsweek's Best Nursing Homes for 2024**, ranking number three in California. Additionally, Edgemoor remains an overall five-star facility on the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Care Compare site for Nursing Homes. Achieving five out of five stars in all four rating categories (Overall Quality, Health Inspection, Quality Measures, Staffing, and RN Staffing).

Check Your Mood Day was held on Thursday, October 5, 2023, in conjunction with National Depression Screening Day. The purpose of this annual event is to engage and encourage San Diegans to monitor and assess their emotional well-being. Getting screened for depression is an important part of healthcare checkups, much like getting your blood pressure checked or being screened for heart disease. San Diegans were encouraged to take the online screening and access free mental health resources on Live Well San Diego website.

The Mental Health America online depression screening tool can be found at the following link: https://screening.mhanational.org/screening-tools/depression/?layout=hide_progress.

BHS ANNOUNCEMENTS

Vista Hill Bridges North Central Regional Recovery Center Closure

Vista Hill Bridges North Central Regional Recovery Center (VH-BNCRRC) will be ending clinical services on December 31, 2023. The North Central Regional Recovery Center will thereafter transition to a new provider who will reach out soon to partnering agencies.

Please be informed that VH-BNCRRC will continue to provide services to clients through December 31, 2023. Those clients scheduled to complete their treatment successfully will be discharged by the closing date. However, clients who require services after December 31, 2023, will be offered outpatient services at other BHS contracted regional recovery centers until the new contractor starts services in 2024.

Respectfully submitted,



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