



COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO HEALTH AGENCY
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH BOARD
Barbara Levenson, Behavioral Health Board Chair
Star Gruber, PhD, LMFT, Behavioral Health Director

SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY BEHAVIORAL HEALTH BOARD (BHB) **2023 ANNUAL REPORT**

April 2024

Executive Summary prepared by Barbara Levenson, Chair.

Status of the Behavioral Health Board (BHB)

Meetings: Regularly scheduled BHB meetings were held on the 3rd Wednesday of each month except July and December using video conferencing (ZOOM), due to the continuing pandemic public health guidelines, until the Emergency measure was rescinded in March. At that time, in-person meetings, with a ZOOM option ensued, until September. A notice of all regular and special BHB meetings was made public, including the prior month's minutes, agendas and notice for public comment via the agency web site. All BHB agendas and minutes are available on the Health Agency website, <https://www.slocounty.ca.gov/Departments/Health-Agency.aspx>. Monthly attendance ranged from 6-18 members, plus staff and guests, for an average of 12.

According to Behavioral Health (BH) Agency Staff, the impact of the COVID pandemic effects had abated, with most services re-established by early 2023. Psychiatric Health Facility (PHF) occupancy and Crisis Stabilization Unit (CSU) usage continued, with optional masking protection measures in place. To address issues affecting those in our community who are not covered by Medi-Cal, partnerships and coalitions have evolved between county BH programs, non-profit organizations, and other providers. Some of these groups have representation on the BHB, and are working to reduce homelessness and opioid overdoses, both of which have affected increased numbers of community members in recent years, earning greater public attention and efforts.

Committees and workgroups

Membership: At year-end, there were 15 members on the BHB, with five vacancies (one consumer, one agency, and three family). Membership includes representation from five agencies and the local chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). San Luis Obispo (SLO) County Board of Supervisors named Supervisor Jimmy Paulding as representative to the BHB; Correctional Lt. Robert Crout was named the alternate representative for the SLO County Sheriff's Office. Recruiting Board members that reflect the diversity of our community is an ongoing goal for the Board. Representation from Veterans' Services, as well as a member who is a recent high school graduate, offer new perspectives to the Board. Social media as well as personal contact were used. The development of new promotional materials that were reviewed at the October meeting will be implemented in 2024, using print and online media, as well as social media postings.

Six members were due for renewal by the BHB on 6/30/23. Three members indicated that they would not be renewing membership beyond that date. Three new members were presented for consideration and a vote in February for eventual action by the Board of Supervisors. All renewals were approved at the March 2023 meeting, then forwarded to the Board of Supervisors.

Goals and Accomplishments

A. Objective: Fulfill the Mandated Responsibilities and core Purposes of the Behavioral Health Board

1. **Goal:** Review and evaluate the community's mental health needs, services, facilities, and special problems [(5604.2(a)(1)] Welfare & Institutions Code (WIC)
2. **Goal:** Review the Capstone Solutions Consulting Group report, that was commissioned to describe and analyze the behavioral health services currently existing in San Luis Obispo (SLO) County, pursuant to the report by the 2022 SLO County Grand Jury and subsequent response by the Behavioral Health Department. The first services to be evaluated were those offered to the adult population. This report, and its recommendations for future planning, was released in August 2023. With the selection of Dr. Star Graber as the new Director of the Behavioral Health Department in May 2023 (following the retirement of the previous Director), the opportunity for implementation of any recommendations into the Strategic Plan being developed in 2024 offers new ways in which the BHB can offer evaluation and input.

"Listening Sessions," coordinated by Health Management Associates, were held on November 14 and 17, 2023 and open to the SLO community at large. "Key Strategy Areas" (5) and "Cross-cutting Goals" (4) within the "Core Continuum of Care" were explained at the presentations as they related to the findings in the Capstone Report. Community members were then encouraged to identify which areas they had particular concerns about.

Combined, the consultants' report and the community input from the listening sessions will aid in the development of successful strategies to improve programs and services.

As identified in the Capstone Report, five areas of concern include:

- a) Workforce Shortage (up to 25% vacancy rate in clinical positions).
- b) Whether SLO County is able to adequately partner with neighboring counties to provide services, due to lack of resources.

- c) Continued use of Full Service Partnerships (FSPs) and other collaborative efforts, some of which rely on donations, have been successful in meeting a wide range of treatment needs.
- d) Despite close personal connections among community leaders to address problem areas, the county's wide-spread geographic locations, lack of transportation, and lack of residential treatment programs leave a void in meeting the needs of the county.
- e) Current use of Emergency Departments in local hospitals to aid in psychiatric crisis management needs reassessment.

Accomplishments:

- Members of the BHB participated in the External Quality Review for mental health and substance use disorder services by attending 6 QST Meetings.
- Members of the BHB regularly participated in Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) Advisory Committee (MAC) stakeholder (now advisor) meetings to jointly decide on priorities and practices for funding allocations regarding County of San Luis Obispo Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) programs by attending 5 MAC meetings.
- Members attended five meetings of the California Association of Local Behavioral Health Boards and Commissions (CALBHB/C), receiving updates and presentations from statewide organizations as well as issue-based discussions among members from other counties.
- Four members participated in the interview process for the selection of the new Director of the Behavioral Health Department.

B. Objective: Maintain an active and diverse Behavioral Health Board.

1. **Goal:** Achieve full BHB membership that reflects the diversity of the population served.

Ongoing Efforts and Accomplishments:

An outreach campaign was undertaken to develop contacts via social media accounts, partnership with other organizations such as Veterans' Services, NAMI, and others, and various networks to attract new members who represent the diversity within the county. A veteran member was added in August 2022, and a young adult was added as a member in 2023.

2. **Goal:** Maintain a high attendance and participation at all BHB meetings, including committees and work groups.

Accomplishments:

There was a 67 percent average attendance for meetings during 2023, impacted by the discontinuation of the virtual meeting option. There is ongoing outreach for new members to ensure improved participation in the activities prioritized for 2024.

3. **Goal:** Maintain representation on appropriate local, regional, and state boards, committee, councils, etc., and regular reporting to the BHB.

Accomplishments:

SLO County BHB was represented at the California Association of Local Behavioral Health Boards and Commissions (CALBHB/C) at its virtual meetings, as well as providing representation to:

External Quality Review Organization (EQRO), Mental Health Services Act Advisory Committee (MAC), and Adult Services Quality Control and others. As a standing agenda item for the regularly scheduled meetings, reports of such activities are made to the BHB membership.

4. **Goal:** Complete 100 percent of site visits.

Accomplishments:

The Ad-Hoc Committee on Site Visits, developed and presented in February 2022, has coordinated site visits to locations where services are provided by County BH Staff. There was participation by three BHB members in conducting the review of the Mental Health Evaluation Team (MHET). In addition to the 2023 formal site visit at the MHET location, a tour of the SLO County Jail Behavioral Health Unit (BHU) was arranged with BHU staff. Six BHB members toured the area in May 2023. Future site visits are in the development stages, beginning in January 2024.

Note: The site visit narrative report may be reviewed as an attachment, found on p.7.

5. **Goal:** Provide training opportunities to BHB Members.

Accomplishments:

Presentations were offered as part of scheduled monthly meetings in order to enhance the knowledge of BHB Members. Learning about the range of programs and activities offered within the county provides opportunity for networking, collaboration and innovation.

Topics for 2023 included:

January – Behavioral Health Overview -Anne Robin, Director. Update on several programs being forwarded in the County, and legislative measures pending. Her retirement scheduled for August 2023 was announced. BHB members were informed about participation in the selection process for a new Director.

February – Dr. Dana Hunt presented a summary of the Site Visit conducted at the SLO Youth Services at the end of October 2022. The written report had been provided to the BHB, but a verbal presentation had not occurred. According to staff at the facility, the shortage of clinicians impairs their ability to provide services at 13 school districts within the county, probation, and in Juvenile Hall.

March – Morgan Torell and Frank Warren – Behavioral Health Bridge House Program – This program is meant to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness with short-term housing (less than 90 days) or mid-term housing (90 days to 2 years, with possible 1-year extensions). Categories of eligibility for funding include outreach and engagement with the identified population. A minimum of 75 percent of funds allotted must be used for shelter/interim housing, rental assistance, and housing navigation. Treatments needs are not covered, and coordination with communities and providers across the county may create conflicts and challenges over planning issues. The Board of Supervisors is actively involved in all steps of approval from application through use of any funds made available.

April – Amanda Getten – QST Division and CalAIM Updates – CalAIM (defined as “California Advancing and Innovating MediCal Services”) strives to transform the Medi-Cal delivery system through modernization of systems, including improved data sharing, performance evaluation methods and streamlined documentation as well as payment reform (from cost-based to fee-for-services).

May – Jon Nibbio (Family Care Network) – This Full-Service Partner uses Wraparound Care, enabled by SB163, offered as an alternative to residential care for youth. This alternative plan offers a way to provide services to these clients and permit them to live in their home, with a relative, or in foster care. The program also serves youth on probation and integrates mental health team members and social workers, as well as rehabilitation and family specialists in a group approach. This has enabled

a reduction in the numbers of youth needing out-of-county institutional care from 150 to the current number of fewer than 10, according to their reports.

June – Jessica Yates – Victim Witness Assistance Center – A wide variety of services and programs help reduce the trauma, frustration and inconvenience experienced by victims of crime, witnesses, and family members affected by crime. These options range from financial resources and transportation to use of a support dog while undergoing court procedures.

August – Landon King – MHSA Innovation Project “EMBRACE”, that is scheduled for a four-year period. Partners Wilshire Community Services and the San Luis Obispo Long-Term Care Ombudsman services will be providing training to staff in Residential Care Facilities for the Elderly (RCFEs) in the identification of symptoms of behavioral health problems in that population. The goal is to provide early intervention by referring residents to available services.

September – Morgan Torell- Mobile Crisis Services and Crisis Continuum of Care – BH Departments across the state are required to provide this crisis service by December 31, 2023. Service will be expanded to include non-MediCal clients. There will be two-person teams available 24/7 to reduce law-enforcement call-outs, ER visits, admissions to inpatient units, and resolving immediate risk of danger. There are plans for the opening of a 10-bed Sobering Center in SLO in 2024, and measures are in progress for creation of an “EMPATH” unit in North County.

October –Frank Warren, Karina Silva Garcia, Andrew Harris and Landon King -MHSA Annual Report Draft – The mandatory 30-day public review and comment period, and assessment by BHB members, was opened following the presentation summarizing activities and use of resources provided under the MHSA plan, to be approved by vote at the November meeting.

November –Frank Warren - No presentation. Discussion and the vote on the MHSA Plan Update replaced the presentation agenda item. The Report was approved for forwarding to the Board of Supervisors.

(The BHB does not meet in July and December.)

MEET THE BOARD MEMBERS

In 2023, Membership Highlights continued as a standing agenda item for most monthly BHB Meetings. As ZOOM continued to be the only platform for meetings until March 2023, BHB members in attendance could hear more about relevant history, experiences and activities of six different members.

MEMBERS LEAVING THE BOARD DURING THE PAST YEAR – THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE!

This is the appropriate place to acknowledge Pam Zweifel, Marshall Hamilton, and Eulalia Apolinar – all of whom were long-time, active BHB members, whose terms concluded or who resigned from the Board in 2023. Additionally, member Johnny Rodriguez also did not renew his term in 2023.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Anne Robin (Behavioral Health Director), who retired in August 2023 and Executive Assistant Laura Zarate who was replaced in January 2023 by Christy Haney, who was, in turn, replaced by Jessica Ybarra in November 2023. Thanks also to the entire Behavioral Health Department Staff and supporting agencies. Their individual contributions to the community and to the operations of the BHB are much appreciated.

Thanks also to guest speakers and community members for information and support this year.

San Luis Obispo County Health Agency Staff:

Our thanks to all the people whose names never appear on reports or commendations but who are working every day to provide the best mental health care system possible to the children and adults of San Luis Obispo County.

MENTAL HEALTH EVALUATION TEAM

Site Visit Summary

Overall Impressions:

The visit to the MHET facility was a pleasant, informative experience. Major strengths were the collaborative design of the program, with clear expectations and its dedication to the resolution of crisis.

Staff were forthcoming with information and statistics. A major goal of the team is to increase the design and use of safety plans by clientele and decrease the number of holds initiated that result in Emergency Room visits. They are approaching their goal of sixty-five percent safety plans and thirty-five percent holds. In addition, we were impressed with the creativity of the Program in utilizing part-time staff particularly in North and South County for calls outside of regular business hours. There are 20 part-time clinicians/social workers who provide services on an on-call basis from 5pm to 8am throughout the county, in addition to three staff between 8am and 5pm. This is information that would be helpful to include in Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) updates for a better understanding of programs.

Limitations to the program include lack of availability of staff, due in part to low salaries, making it difficult for the program to compete for the limited number of local clinicians and social workers. Additionally, staff noted the lack of services for children in the county as a significant limitation.

Other obstacles were distance to services and lack of available local placements for clients who require residential care.

Our team was surprised to learn that the team answers between 150 to 175 calls county wide every month.

The MHET focus is those in crisis. In response to calls from the Hotline, Managed Care or police department dispatch, the team meets the client where they are located. They determine the appropriate resolution to the situation. If a hold is required, they can accompany the client to the emergency room and assist with finding a location for the client.

The MHET aligns with the Sierra Wellness peer support group who can sit with a client in the hospital emergency department while the paperwork and medical tests are completed. This service can help to calm or distract the client as they wait for placements and transportation to be arranged.

The MHET has three bilingual staff members who speak Spanish. When other language translations are required, the MHET generally uses the "Language Line" to facilitate communication.