



# BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

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# HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY

**MINUTES – Approved**  
**August 17, 2023**

## **MENTAL HEALTH ADVISORY BOARD – SPECIAL MEETING**

AUGUST 1, 2023 ♦ 3:00 PM - 4:30 PM

1400 EMELINE AVENUE, ROOMS 206-207, SANTA CRUZ

Microsoft Teams Meeting (831) 454-2222, Conference 650 945 397#

**Present:** Celeste Gutierrez, Hugh McCormick, Jeffrey Arlt, Jennifer Wells Kaupp, Michael Neidig, Xaloc Cabanes  
**Excused:** Laura Chatham, Valerie Webb, Supervisor Felipe Hernandez  
**Absent:** Antonio Rivas (joined virtually at 4:17pm)  
**Staff:** Jane Batoon-Kurovski

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- I. Roll Call – Quorum present. Meeting called to order at 3:05 p.m. by Chair Xaloc Cabanes.
- II. Public Comments
  1. Richard Gallo
    - Stated he is not happy with the Innovation plan as it is not client, family driven. He said it was a county driven document without input from the community. There is no mention of individuals participating from the SMI community and their families. Richard said the CPP process was not followed in the Innovation plan.
    - The Oversight Commission is taking a step back on retraining people on the purpose of MHSA and what the responsibilities are. Richard said the Oversight Commission has not transformed our mental health system the way it is supposed to be done. The two populations they neglected are peer support/peer services and the SMI unhoused community. Richard said he will ask the Oversight Commission, unless the County revises it after public comments, to reject the Innovation plan.
    - On August 22<sup>nd</sup>, SB326 will be reviewed and there will be a rally in Sacramento. Richard stated they will take away a billion dollars to use strictly for housing. He said a peer community is needed to educate our state elected officials.
- III. Board Member Announcements
  - Confirmation that Jeffrey Arlt is still a MHAB member, as the agenda stated a vacancy in District 5.
- IV. Special Business – Responses to the Grand Jury Report  
The Mental Health Advisory Board reviewed each question in the packet, and all members agreed to submit it as discussed (see attached Grand Jury Report).
- V. Adjournment  
Meeting adjourned at 5:05 p.m.



The 2022–2023 Santa Cruz County Civil Grand Jury  
Invites the

## Mental Health Advisory Board

to Respond by September 11, 2023

to the Findings and Recommendations listed below  
which were assigned to them in the report titled

## Diagnosing the Crisis in Behavioral Health Underfunded, Understaffed & Overworked

Responses are **invited** from appointed agency and department heads, appointed committees, and non-profit agencies contracted to the county which are investigated by the grand jury. You are not required to respond by the California Penal Code ([PC](#)) [§933\(c\)](#); if you do, [PC](#) [§933\(c\)](#) requires you to make your response available to the public.

If you choose to respond, your response will be considered **compliant** under [PC §933.05](#) if it contains an appropriate comment on **all** findings and recommendations **which were assigned to you** in the report.

Please follow the instructions below when preparing your response.

## Instructions for Respondents

Your assigned [Findings](#) and [Recommendations](#) are listed on the following pages with check boxes and an expandable space for summaries, timeframes, and explanations. Please follow these instructions, which paraphrase [PC §933.05](#):

1. ***For the Findings, mark one of the following responses with an “X” and provide the required additional information:***
  - a. **AGREE with the Finding**, or
  - b. **PARTIALLY DISAGREE with the Finding** – specify the portion of the Finding that is disputed and include an explanation of the reasons why, or
  - c. **DISAGREE with the Finding** – provide an explanation of the reasons why.
2. ***For the Recommendations, mark one of the following actions with an “X” and provide the required additional information:***
  - a. **HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED** – provide a summary of the action taken, or
  - b. **HAS NOT YET BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IN THE FUTURE** – provide a timeframe or expected date for completion, or
  - c. **REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS** – provide an explanation, scope, and parameters of an analysis to be completed within six months, or
  - d. **WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED** – provide an explanation of why it is not warranted or not reasonable.
3. ***Please confirm the date on which you approved the assigned responses:***

**We approved these responses in a regular public meeting as shown in our minutes dated August 1, 2023.**

4. ***When your responses are complete, please email your completed Response Packet as a PDF file attachment to both***

The Honorable Judge Syda Cogliati [Syda.Cogliati@santacruzcourt.org](mailto:Syda.Cogliati@santacruzcourt.org) and

The Santa Cruz County Grand Jury [grandjury@scgrandjury.org](mailto:grandjury@scgrandjury.org).

***If you have questions about this response form, please contact the Grand Jury by calling 831-454-2099 or by sending an email to [grandjury@scgrandjury.org](mailto:grandjury@scgrandjury.org).***

## Findings

- F1.** The chronic understaffing in the Behavioral Health Division (BHD) and their contractors is negatively impacting the department's ability to meet goals and to provide services in a timely and effective manner.

**AGREE**

**PARTIALLY DISAGREE**

**DISAGREE**

**Response explanation** (required for a response other than **Agree**):

We recommend that they find more roles and move quicker on hiring peer support, which will go a long way to address the chronic understaffing, help with retention and save money in the process.

**F2.** The County Personnel Department has been slow to respond to the chronic understaffing in the Behavioral Health Division. It has not put measures into place to speed up the hiring process or to create competitive salaries and incentives for the non-medical personnel who staff the BHD positions. Nor have they created connections with nearby universities to groom a clinical workforce. This causes unnecessary delays in hiring mental health professionals.

**AGREE**

**PARTIALLY DISAGREE**

**DISAGREE**

**Response explanation** (required for a response other than **Agree**):

The hiring process is slow, complicated, and opaque. The Mental Health division is given a budget to work with and is constrained in their ability in what they are able to offer. In addition, the Behavioral Health division has worked and is working with local non-profits, colleges, and universities.

**F3.** Both the Personnel Department and the Behavioral Health Division do not have enough analysts to allow an adequate review of their programs and systems, including analyzing the County’s hiring process. This makes it difficult for them to improve services.

**AGREE**

**PARTIALLY DISAGREE**

**DISAGREE**

**Response explanation** (required for a response other than **Agree**):

[Empty response explanation box]

**F4.** The Crisis Stabilization Program (CSP) has been diverting patients experiencing a mental health crisis to hospital emergency departments too frequently, delaying diagnosis, delaying treatment, and placing an extra burden on the emergency departments, which are already overcrowded. The emergency departments then become responsible for finding an inpatient facility for patients who cannot be safely discharged to outpatient care, which further stretches limited resources.

- AGREE**
- PARTIALLY DISAGREE**
- DISAGREE**

**Response explanation** (required for a response other than **Agree**):

The absence of crisis stabilization program being provided by Dominican Hospital, Watsonville Hospital or any CBO in the county, places additional burden on Behavioral Health division to provide these services. We recommend that at minimum, each hospital create a 23-hour crisis stabilization center on their campus, similar to what Dominican Hospital provided until 2013. Telecare was the only provider that offered a contract.

**F5.** The limited hours that the Mobile Emergency Response Team and Mobile Emergency Response Team for Youth operate interfere with a timely assessment of patients in a mental health crisis, negatively impacting patient care.

**AGREE**

**PARTIALLY DISAGREE**

**DISAGREE**

**Response explanation** (required for a response other than **Agree**):

**F6.** An inadequate number of beds at the Psychiatric Healthcare Facility (PHF) results in the practice of sending patients out of county, which negatively impacts the patient's care, and is expensive for the Behavioral Health Division.

**AGREE**

**PARTIALLY DISAGREE**

**DISAGREE**

**Response explanation** (required for a response other than **Agree**):

**F7.** The County plans to close the current Crisis Stabilization Program (CSP) to patients under 18 after June 30, 2023, and the new CSP/PHF in Live Oak will not be open until late 2024 or early 2025 compromising crisis care to minors for 18 months or more.

- AGREE**
- PARTIALLY DISAGREE**
- DISAGREE**

**Response explanation** (required for a response other than **Agree**):

The provider Telecare notified the Behavioral Health division that it would no longer accept patients under 18. This was not a plan by the Behavioral Health division.

**F8.** The large number of high cost beneficiaries results in additional demands on an already overloaded behavioral health system.

**AGREE**

**PARTIALLY DISAGREE**

**DISAGREE**

**Response explanation** (required for a response other than **Agree**):

Mental Health is expensive, underfunded and a chronic illness requiring multiple episodes of treatment.

**F9.** The new Sí Se Puede Behavioral Health Center in Watsonville is a big step in the right direction, and will provide significantly increased service capacity, but it is still not enough.

**AGREE**

**PARTIALLY DISAGREE**

**DISAGREE**

**Response explanation** (required for a response other than **Agree**):

The model should be assessed to see if it can be replicated in other areas in the County.

**F10.** The lack of step-down care for patients completing both inpatient and outpatient treatment often results in patients relapsing and needing retreatment, which is bad for the patient and increases costs for the Behavioral Health Division.

**AGREE**

**PARTIALLY DISAGREE**

**DISAGREE**

**Response explanation** (required for a response other than **Agree**):

**F11.** The high rate of homelessness and Substance Use Disorder in the County results in the Behavioral Health Division's clients that are especially demanding and difficult to treat.

**AGREE**

**PARTIALLY DISAGREE**

**DISAGREE**

**Response explanation** (required for a response other than **Agree**):

We find the terminology dehumanizing and the lack of affordable housing is not addressed.

**F12.** The Behavioral Health Division is insufficiently funded and staffed to provide adequate step down care for their patients, many of whom are homeless, and/or recently released from jail, and thus have a need for support.

**AGREE**

**PARTIALLY DISAGREE**

**DISAGREE**

**Response explanation** (required for a response other than **Agree**):

The absence of participation by Central California Alliance for Health and from the private sector to provide prevention and early intervention and behavioral health services as a whole is a significant contributor to the lack of support.

**F13.** Outreach to the Latino/a community is insufficient because of the lack of bilingual and bicultural staff contributing to disproportionate underutilization of mental health services within the Latino/a community.

- AGREE
- PARTIALLY DISAGREE
- DISAGREE

**Response explanation** (required for a response other than **Agree**):

This does not account for the stigma that mental health has in the Latina/Latino/LatinX community, nor does it mention the new mental health facility at 1430 Freedom Blvd in Watsonville, and that hiring states preferred bilingual.

**F14.** The current pay differential for bilingual staff is insufficient to attract and retain suitably qualified staff making adequate outreach to the Latino/a community difficult.

**AGREE**

**PARTIALLY DISAGREE**

**DISAGREE**

**Response explanation** (required for a response other than **Agree**):

The pay differential is comparable to other surrounding counties; however, we believe it should be increased. This does not account for the huge hiring challenges across the county nor how the cost of housing impacts recruitment of bilingual staff.

## Recommendations

- R1.** Competitive salaries and hiring incentives should be put in place for all vacant Behavioral Health Division (BHD) positions that don't already have them. The BHD should consider the salaries and hiring incentives offered by Santa Clara County as a guide - such as hiring bonuses, loan repayment, public service loan repayment, and workforce tuition. The Personnel Department must plan for increases in salary and incentives by the end of 2023 with the goal of including them in the next budget cycle. (F1, F2, F8)

—

**HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED** – summarize what has been done

—

**HAS NOT YET BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IN THE FUTURE** – summarize what will be done and the timeframe

X

**REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS** – explain the scope and timeframe (not to exceed six months)

—

**WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED** – explain why

### **Required response explanation, summary, and timeframe:**

Personnel Department does not make the budget for the salary or incentives. Monterey County should also be included as a guide and the year-end unexpended funds should be earmarked for bonuses for existing employees.

**R2.** The County Personnel Department should plan to do an analysis of the hiring process for BHD positions and put measures into place to reduce the time it takes to hire by at least half. They should streamline the process and make use of up to date automated processes by the end of 2023. (F1, F2, F3)

- HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED** – summarize what has been done
- HAS NOT YET BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IN THE FUTURE** – summarize what will be done and the timeframe
- REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS** – explain the scope and timeframe (not to exceed six months)
- WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED** – explain why

**Required response explanation, summary, and timeframe:**

The hiring process should be thoroughly reviewed, and best hiring practices should be implemented.

**R3.** The County Personnel Department should institute an annual competitive analysis for all open BHD positions that includes consideration of the extraordinarily high cost of living in Santa Cruz, benefits and incentives. This should be completed by the end of 2023. (F2, F3)

- HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED** – summarize what has been done
- HAS NOT YET BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IN THE FUTURE** – summarize what will be done and the timeframe
- REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS** – explain the scope and timeframe (not to exceed six months)
- WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED** – explain why

**Required response explanation, summary, and timeframe:**

These and other strategies are being looked at. The time frame does not seem to allow for meaningful action to take place.

**R4.** The County Personnel Department should develop connections and internships with nearby universities that have Psychology and Social Work programs to groom a clinical workforce. A plan for this should be completed by the end of 2023. (F1, F2)

- HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED** – summarize what has been done
- HAS NOT YET BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IN THE FUTURE** – summarize what will be done and the timeframe
- REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS** – explain the scope and timeframe (not to exceed six months)
- WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED** – explain why

**Required response explanation, summary, and timeframe:**

This is currently implemented and will continue to be built upon. We encourage connections with interns, as well as professors, academic advisors and include outreach to high school psychology classes.

**R5.** To eliminate the frequent offloading of the Behavioral Health Division (BHD) clients to local hospital emergency departments, the Board of Supervisors and BHD should evaluate ways to increase the number of Crisis Stabilization Program chairs and psychiatric beds available, which may include planning for another adult Psychiatric Healthcare Facility. This evaluation and planning process should be completed by the end of 2023. (F5, F7)

- HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED** – summarize what has been done
- HAS NOT YET BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IN THE FUTURE** – summarize what will be done and the timeframe
- REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS** – explain the scope and timeframe (not to exceed six months)
- WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED** – explain why

**Required response explanation, summary, and timeframe:**

The absence of crisis stabilization program being provided by Dominican Hospital, Watsonville Hospital or any CBO in the county, places additional burden on Behavioral Health division to provide these services. We recommend that at minimum, each hospital create a 23-hour crisis stabilization center on their campus, similar to what Dominican Hospital provided until 2013. ER's are not designed and should not be used as CSP. Hospitals and CBO's need to step up to the plate and provide services for the community, reducing the burden on the Behavioral Health division.

**R6.** The Behavioral Health Division should improve the services provided by the Mobile Emergency Response Team and the Mobile Emergency Response Team for Youth by improving staffing and expanding coverage to 24/7. This should be completed by the end of 2023. (F6)

- HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED** – summarize what has been done
- HAS NOT YET BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IN THE FUTURE** – summarize what will be done and the timeframe
- REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS** – explain the scope and timeframe (not to exceed six months)
- WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED** – explain why

**Required response explanation, summary, and timeframe:**

Funding for MERT/MERTY requires different deliverables. Funding is needed to expand services to 24/7. Please specify the improvements of staff. We recommend increasing staff and integrating peer support and coordinating with school wellness centers and youth programs.

**R7.** The Behavioral Health Division should ensure that there is a smooth transition plan and back up plan for the treatment of children and youths from the current Crisis Stabilization Program to the planned new facility in Live Oak other than diverting them to emergency departments. This should be completed by September 30, 2023. (F8)

- HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED** – summarize what has been done
- HAS NOT YET BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IN THE FUTURE** – summarize what will be done and the timeframe
- REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS** – explain the scope and timeframe (not to exceed six months)
- WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED** – explain why

**Required response explanation, summary, and timeframe:**

A site has been located; funds and staff will be needed. This will be accomplished as the latter two are secured. Recommend that the Mental Health Advisory Board be included on the oversight committee of the interim facility.

**R8.** The Behavioral Health Division should request sufficient funding from the County to provide adequate step down care so patients do not relapse and need yet more care. This request should be in place by the end of 2023. (F8, F10 – F12)

- HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED** – summarize what has been done
- HAS NOT YET BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IN THE FUTURE** – summarize what will be done and the timeframe
- REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS** – explain the scope and timeframe (not to exceed six months)
- WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED** – explain why

**Required response explanation, summary, and timeframe:**

Behavioral Health division continuously advocates for more funding from Federal, State and private sector for multiple programs that are under or not funded including step down care.

**R9.** The Behavioral Health Division should continue to improve bilingual/bicultural outreach to the Latino/a population, including whether any language besides Spanish reaches the threshold to warrant offering the bilingual pay differential. Improvements should be in place by the end of 2023. (F13, F14)

- HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED** – summarize what has been done
- HAS NOT YET BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IN THE FUTURE** – summarize what will be done and the timeframe
- REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS** – explain the scope and timeframe (not to exceed six months)
- WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED** – explain why

**Required response explanation, summary, and timeframe:**

We continue to encourage the county to not only offer bilingual pay differential and bilingual bicultural pay differential, but there should also be an increase.

**R10.** The Behavioral Health Division should review the recruitment and retention of bilingual staff, including an increase to the current bilingual pay differential, in an effort to improve bilingual services. This should be completed by the end of 2023. (F13, F14)

- HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED** – summarize what has been done
- HAS NOT YET BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IN THE FUTURE** – summarize what will be done and the timeframe
- REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS** – explain the scope and timeframe (not to exceed six months)
- WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED** – explain why

**Required response explanation, summary, and timeframe:**

Behavioral Health division and Personnel continue to advocate for more funding for best candidates for county positions.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:**

**This Grand Jury report does not take into consideration the ongoing dedication without compensation of behavioral health staff and providers. They were not allowed as first responders.**