

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ACTION

May 2018

Our Purpose

To join in a powerful and diverse coalition leading California to improve behavioral health through collaboration of services and care, without stigma, for all Californians.

Our Objectives

To Elevate – it is the mission of this coalition to lift the issue of behavioral health to the top of the list of federal, state and local priorities. We will work together to create opportunities to give voice to the problems, needs and potential solutions for improving behavioral health in California.

To Educate – this coalition will play a leading role in educating and influencing elected officials and other key decision makers, the many professionals who witness California’s behavioral health challenges every day, and the public about issues, challenges and needed improvements.

To Innovate – a key role of this coalition is to be an incubator for new ideas...to think differently about ways to address behavioral health needs, remove legal and regulatory barriers to improvement, create new and innovative ways to prevent, treat and support Californians in need.

Our Path Forward

Focus on the “intersectionality” of the many interests represented.

Develop, collect and share best practices to inform all those involved.

Identify implementable change for service gaps, models of care, and funding streams to support.

Create a plan to improve access and effective treatment for the behavioral health care needs of Californians.

Execute the innovative ideas, by communicating, advocating, and educating change makers throughout California.

Our Focused Common Agenda

As a coalition, our goal is to create a movement within California for more coordinated and integrated care services for individuals with behavioral health needs and to reduce stigma and disparities in behavioral health resources and care that exist in our communities. Many existing systems touch the lives of those with behavioral health needs – health care, social services, law enforcement, criminal justice, education, and more. The needs are great. The existing systems are complex. The gaps in service and the resulting opportunities are equally enormous.

There are many opportunities for investment, innovation, and change to the behavioral health system. This coalition, involving some of the best experts in the state, believes that, of all the actions that could be undertaken, the following focused agenda provides commonly agreed upon initial and immediate action steps for California:

1) **Prevention and Early Intervention of Behavioral Health Needs**

- a. Awareness: Education of the public about behavioral health to destigmatize behavioral health needs and promote behavioral health. Shift focus from responding to acute crises to preventing crisis through wellness and prevention.
- b. Availability: Adequate prevention and early intervention resources and services for those needing help at first on-set of a behavioral health challenge.
- c. Access: Coordinated effort among all to remove barriers to accessing care.

Recommended Action – Make it a top state priority to define, evaluate, invest in and deploy best practices for preventing behavioral health crises, and intervening with individuals and families, especially children, early. Best practices should include changing the way people think about mental illness and substance use disorder through social media and other new tools, removing payment barriers to parity and to people accessing care when they need it, and creating an integrated model for addressing behavioral health in California.

2) **Crisis Prevention and Response**

- a. Educate: Reduce stigma in the general population, including those providing care and assistance to individuals with behavioral health needs and change the culture through training and education.
- b. Engage: Achieve best outcomes by eradicating the silos in the behavioral health system through greater collaboration and engagement of every touch point along the continuum of care.
- c. Evolve: Humanize rather than criminalize those in crisis by providing the right care at the right time and in the right setting. Those dealing with a behavioral health crisis should be able to access directly the appropriate care or service provider.

Recommended Action – Identify and invest in the consistent deployment and spread of best practices in crisis care models including crisis stabilization units, crisis residential programs, and peer respite programs. Invest in and continue to fund the Investment in Mental Health Wellness Act of 2013 to support these efforts.

3) **Workforce Development and Improvement**

- a. Determine: Recognize and invest in the behavioral health workforce shortage in California, with a focus on diversity. Identify gaps and determine the need for existing and new types of behavioral health providers of care, service and support. Invest where needed, with emphasis on expanding the diversity of the workforce.
- b. Develop: Develop new types of providers for behavioral health services to leverage new and different types of treatment, care and support.
- c. Distribute: Integrate behavioral health care with primary care and ensure that the workforce resources, especially human resources, are sufficient to meet demand and well-distributed throughout communities. Integration of behavioral health within traditional care and service settings will allow those experiencing early symptoms to get the care they need, when they need it, but only if there is widespread geographic distribution of professionals who are knowledgeable in behavioral health.

Recommended Action – Address critical shortages of behavioral health professionals by recognizing and facilitating reimbursement for existing behavioral health workers and expanding the workforce by developing additional qualified paraprofessionals, including psychiatric rehabilitation practitioners, peer counselors, community health workers, promotoras, cultural brokers, and others.