

**BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ADVISORY BOARD
General Meeting**

Monday, August 21, 2023, 1:00PM – 3:30 PM
Ventura County Behavioral Health (VCBH)
1911 Williams Drive, Training Room (first floor) • Oxnard, CA 93036

IN-PERSON & VIRTUAL MEETING VIA ZOOM

Zoom Participation

The following information referenced below and at the end of the agenda is provided to you in support of your attending the upcoming BHAB General Meeting via Zoom:

Join the Zoom meeting in the following way:

Join Zoom Meeting: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83332714732?pwd=bE43OUJqRHhHa0ExSIR5L1VLMWMyQT09>

Meeting ID: 833 3271 4732

Password: 149553

Dial-In: 669-900-9128

Under AB 2449 New Teleconferencing Rules:

The Ventura County Behavioral Health Advisory Board General Committee may take action at the beginning of the meeting regarding requests for “Just Cause” or “Emergency” allowances provided that related Brown Act guidelines are met. (Guidelines are listed on the last page of this agenda.)

AGENDA

- I. Call to Order
- II. Quorum Roll Call & Introductions
- III. Roll Call of Members with Just Cause
 - a. State others present in the room over the age of 18
- IV. Requests for Emergency Circumstances – **ACTION** (Roll Call)
- V. Approval of the Agenda – **ACTION** (Roll Call)
- VI. Approval of the July 17, 2023 Minutes – **ACTION** (Roll Call)
- VII. Public Comments (3 min. per speaker)
- VIII. Chair Comments (10 min.)
- IX. Time Certain Presentation – 1:30 p.m. – EvalCorp: “Preliminary Findings from Provider Key Stakeholder Interviews and Listening Sessions” – Kristen Donovan, Dustin Anderson, & Rae Hanstad (20 min.) (10 min. Q&A)
- X. Director’s Report – Scott Gilman (10 min.)
- XI. Board Member Comments and Announcements (3 min. per speaker) (Round Robin)
- XII. Secretary’s Report/Announcements – Jennifer Morrison (10 min.)
- XIII. BHAB Committee Reports (5 min each)
 - A. Prevention Committee (July 25) – Janis Gardner, Chair
 - B. Youth & Family Committee (August 9) – Kevin Clerici, Chair
 - C. Transitional Age Youth (TAY) (August 16) – Elizabeth R. Stone, Chair

XIV. Old Business

- A. Site Visits Resumption – Announcement/Request for site visits – Janis Gardner, Chair (10 min.)

XV. New Business

- A. Annual Report Workgroup – Michael Rodriguez, Chair Emeritus
B. Presentation Requests
C. Recognition Award Recommendations

XVI. Contracts

Board of Supervisors Approved Agreements – July 11, 2023

1. FY 2023-26 VCOE Amendment for School-Based Wellness Center Services.

XVII. Public Comments (3 min. per speaker)

XVIII. Recognition Award, (posthumously), for Carmen Ramirez, Former 5th District Supervisor of Ventura County – Liz Warren

XIX. Adjourn

Next Meeting: Monday, September 18, 2023

All agenda reports and supporting data, including those filed in accordance with Government Code Section 54957.5 (b) (1) and (2) are available from the Behavioral Health Advisory Board Assistant at bhabadmin@ventura.org or in person at Ventura County Behavioral Health, 2nd Floor, 1911 Williams Drive, Oxnard, California. The same materials will be available and attached with each associated agenda item, when received, at the following website: www.vcbh.org/en/behavioral-health-advisory-board-meetings.

Welcome to the meeting of the Behavioral Health Advisory Board of the County of Ventura. The following information is provided to help you understand, follow, and participate in the Board meeting:

Join the Zoom meeting by clicking the link provided on the agenda at the scheduled time and date. Zoom will initially start with a **waiting room** — you will be admitted into the meeting room when the meeting starts. All participants are muted upon entry to minimize any unintended disruption of background sounds. Please keep yourself on mute unless you are speaking.

Note: The meeting is recorded.

Public Comments

- The Behavioral Health Advisory Board (BHAB) welcomes comments from the community, consumers, and family members.
- The BHAB operates under the Brown Act. This requires that all meetings be open meetings, with the agenda and minutes posted. A public comment period will be provided on all meeting agendas.
- Due to confidentiality laws, the Board is unable to respond directly to a public comment or to discuss client-specific issues without proper releases from the individuals concerned.

- At all BHAB meetings, the BHAB Assistant provides a Grievance Form for individuals who have concerns. The form is reviewed promptly by VCBH Quality Management. Individuals can also contact the BHAB Assistant to request a VCBH Grievance Form outside a BHAB meeting or call 1-888-567-2122.
- Individuals who have further concerns are welcome to return to the BHAB for assistance.

Public comments may be provided using one of the following options:

1. Email or Mail Public Comment in Advance of the Meeting

To make a written public comment, you must send an email to bhabadmin@ventura.org, with the specific agenda item or topic, if a general comment, by no later than 10:00 AM on the day of the BHAB meeting. Your written public comment may also be mailed to the following address and must be received by the BHAB Assistant no later than 10 AM on the day of the meeting:

BHAB Assistant, 1911 Williams Drive, Suite 200, Oxnard, CA 93036

Please indicate in the subject line the agenda item number (e.g., Item No. 9) on which you are commenting. Your written public comment sent via email or regular mail will be distributed to the BHAB Members and placed into the item's record of the meeting.

Or

2. In-Person Public Comment

If you are attending in-person, you may provide public comment when the Chair invites public comment.

Or

3. Video Public Comment using Zoom

You may use the raise hand feature when the Chair invites public comments in the following ways:

If you are running an older version of Zoom, you can raise your hand by clicking on the Participant button at the bottom of the Zoom screen and then click on the raise hand feature in that participant window.

If you are running the most current version of Zoom (5.4.9 and above) you can raise your hand by clicking on the Reactions button and then clicking on raise hand feature. Your hand will appear in the upper left-hand corner of your individual Zoom window as well as the participant window.

Call-In Public Comment using Zoom

If you are joining the meeting by telephone only, you can join the comment queue by pressing *9. When it is your turn to make your comment, press *6 to unmute and then again to mute yourself after speaking.

Note: Your raised hand will appear TO THE HOST in the order it was received.

Comments are taken in the order they are received in the queue/participant window. When it is your turn to make a comment, you will be asked to unmute yourself. **Public comments on agenda items can be made prior to or during consideration of agenda items and are limited to 3 minutes per speaker.** Public comment periods are limited to no more than (20) minutes total for all speakers. The assigned timekeeper will track each public comment time. When your time is up, the timekeeper will interrupt to let you know that you have reached the 3-minute maximum. At the end of the three minutes, the next person in the comment queue will be invited to speak.

REMINDER: In order to minimize distractions during public meetings, all personal communication devices should be turned off or put in a non-audible mode.

Public comments on agenda items can be made prior to or during consideration of agenda items and are limited to 3 minutes per speaker. Public comment periods are limited to no more than (20) minutes total for all speakers. In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, if you need special assistance to participate in this meeting, please contact Behavioral Health Administration at (805) 981-6830. Reasonable advance notification of the need for accommodation prior to the meeting (48 hours advance notice is preferable) will enable us to make reasonable arrangements to ensure accessibility to this meeting.

Brown Act “Just Cause” or “Member Emergency” Allowance Guidelines for Board Members:

Requirements: A local board/commission member may participate remotely without posting their physical location on the agenda if all the following requirements are met:

1. Quorum at Physical Location - At least a quorum of the members of the board/commission participates in person from a singular physical location clearly identified in the agenda.
2. Public Access - (Both Remote and In-Person) The public may access the meeting through:
 - A two-way audiovisual platform or
 - A two-way telephonic service and a live webcasting of the meeting
 - In-Person Public Access to the physical location.

Circumstances: One of the following circumstances applies:

1. **“Just Cause”** - The member notifies the legislative body at the earliest opportunity possible, including at the start of a regular meeting, of their need to participate remotely for just cause, including a general description of the circumstances relating to their need to appear remotely at the given meeting. The provisions of this clause shall not be used by any member of the legislative body for more than two meetings per calendar year. **or**
2. **“Emergency Circumstances”** - The member requests to participate in the meeting remotely due to emergency circumstances and the board/commission takes action to approve the request. The board/commission shall request a general description of the circumstances relating to the member’s need to appear remotely at the given meeting. A general description of an item generally need not exceed 20 words and shall not require the member to disclose any medical diagnosis or disability, or any personal medical information.

Procedures:

1. Member Request - A member shall make a request to participate remotely at a meeting pursuant to this clause as soon as possible. The member shall make a separate request for each meeting in which they seek to participate remotely.
2. Board/Commission Response - The board/commission may take action on a request to participate remotely at the earliest opportunity. If the request does not allow sufficient time to place proposed action on such a request on the posted agenda for the meeting for which the request is made, the legislative body may take action at the beginning of the meeting.
3. Disclosure - The member shall publicly disclose at the meeting before any action is taken, whether any other individuals 18 years of age or older are present in the room at the remote location with the member, and the general nature of the member’s relationship with any such individuals.
4. BOTH Audio & Visual Participation - The member shall participate through both audio and visual technology.
5. Limits to Remote Participation - The provisions of this subdivision [of the Brown Act] shall not serve as a means for any member of a legislative body to participate in meetings of the legislative body solely by teleconference from a remote location for a period of more than three consecutive months or 20 percent of the regular meetings for the local agency within a calendar year, or more than two meetings if the legislative body regularly meets fewer than 10 times per calendar year.

DEFINITIONS:

“Emergency circumstances”: A physical or family medical emergency that prevents a member from attending in person.

“Just cause” means any of the following:

1. A childcare or caregiving need (for a child, parent, grandparent, grandchild, sibling, spouse, or domestic partner) that requires the member to participate remotely.
2. A contagious illness prevents the member from attending the meeting in person.
3. A need related to defined physical or mental disability that is not otherwise accommodated for.
4. Traveling while on official business of the Brown Act Bode or another state or local agency.
5. Just Cause is limited to two instances per calendar year.

For additional information, see pages 4+ of the Brown Act Guide: calbhbc.org/brown-act

From: pete lafollette <plafollette@yahoo.com>
Sent: Wednesday, July 19, 2023 1:53 PM
To: DeLeon, Jakeline <Jakeline.DeLeon@ventura.org>
Subject: oversight placed in the disbursement of funds

WARNING: If you believe this message may be malicious use the Phish Alert Button to report it or forward the message to Email.Security@ventura.org.

HI JAKY...PLS post following PC for August VCBH General Mtg

----- Forwarded Message -----

Really important that that stakeholder oversight placed in the disbursement of funds, that it actually goes where lawfully intended, and not become another cadillac roll out for contractors, consultants, advisors, without getting around to the actual supported housing. There are no uniform governing authorities for MHSA on county by county basis, which has led to obfuscating of funding which would apply to Care Court initiative. Also those counties with political clout could monopolize funding if no uniform criteria is being met as well- if no recovery modeling in place- for example no sobriety or behavioral treatment required, critics of plan could cite blight on the community or warehousing with no demonstrated outcome besides basic survival needs being met. Of course we MHSA stakeholders desire homelessness addressed- but funds are for specific use such as SMI, not to solve broader societal ills, there is not enough anywhere to apply to the broad middle class slippage experiences everywhere now.

Pete LaFollette/Ventura County

TRANSLATION:

----- Mensaje reenviado -----

Realmente importante que esa supervisión de las partes interesadas coloque en el desembolso de fondos, que realmente vaya a donde legalmente se pretende, y no se convierta en otro despliegue de cadillac para contratistas, consultores, asesores, sin llegar a la vivienda con apoyo real. No hay autoridades gubernamentales uniformes para MHSA condado por condado, lo que ha llevado a la ofuscación de fondos que se aplicarían a la iniciativa del Tribunal de Atención. Además, aquellos condados con influencia política podrían monopolizar la financiación si no se cumplen criterios uniformes, si no se implementan modelos de recuperación, por ejemplo, no se requiere sobriedad o tratamiento conductual, los críticos del plan podrían citar la plaga en la comunidad o el almacenamiento sin resultado demostrado además de satisfacer las necesidades básicas de supervivencia. Por supuesto, las partes interesadas de MHSA deseamos que se aborde la falta de vivienda, pero los fondos son para uso específico, como SMI, no para resolver males sociales más amplios, no hay suficiente en ningún lugar para aplicar a las amplias experiencias de deslizamiento de la clase media en todas partes ahora.

Pete LaFollette/Condado de Ventura



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Continuum of Care Needs Assessment Evaluación de las Necesidades en la Continuidad de Atención

Provider Engagement Updates
Presentation to the BHAB

Actualizaciones de Participación
de Proveedores
Presentación al BHAB

August 21, 2023

Agenda | Agenda

1. Needs Assessment Overview
2. Stakeholder Interviews
 - a) Progress Update
 - b) Preliminary Themes
3. Listening Sessions Preliminary Findings

1. Resumen de Evaluación de Necesidades
2. Entrevistas de Partes Interesados
 1. Actualización del Progreso
 2. Temas Preliminares
3. Temas Preliminares de Sesiones de Escucha

Acknowledgments

Expresiones de Gratitud

Needs Assessment Recap

Resumen de Evaluación de Necesidades

Needs Assessment Overview Recap

Resumen de Evaluación de Necesidades

Purpose

This is a comprehensive continuum of care assessment of Ventura County's Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Services delivery systems of care for the mild to seriously mentally ill receiving services within the county departments, agencies, and The Superior Court of California - Country of Ventura.

Objetivo

Esta es una evaluación integral de la continuidad de atención de los sistemas de provisión de Servicios de Salud Mental y Desórdenes por Uso de Sustancias del Condado de Ventura para los enfermos mentales de leves a graves que reciben servicios dentro de los departamentos y agencias del condado y el Tribunal Superior de California - País de Ventura.

Definitions

Definiciones

Community Members

Current or potential users of mental health or substance use services.

Providers/Stakeholders

Deliver direct mental health or substance use services

Stakeholders

Facilitate or support direct mental health or substance use services

Miembros de la Comunidad

Usuarios actuales o potenciales de servicios de salud mental o uso de sustancias.

Proveedores

Brindar servicios directos de salud mental o uso de sustancias

Partes interesadas

Facilitar o apoyar servicios directos de salud mental o uso de sustancias

Data Collection Activities

Actividades de Recopilación de Datos



Primary Data

- In-Depth Interviews
 - Community Members
 - Providers/Stakeholders
- Community Listening Sessions
- Surveys
 - Community Members
 - Providers/Stakeholders



Datos Primarios

- Entrevistas en Profundidad
 - Miembros Comunitarios
 - Proveedores y Partes Interesadas
- Sesiones de Escucha
- Encuestas
 - Miembros Comunitarios
 - Proveedores y Partes Interesadas



Secondary

- Prevalence and utilization of service



Datos Secundarios

- Prevalencia y uso del servicio

Overview: Mental Health Service Delivery System

Resumen: Sistema de Provisión de Servicios de Salud Mental

Insurance Payer Source				
	Private Insurance	Medi-Cal/GC	Medicare	Uninsured
Severe	Primary Care Provider	VCBH	Authorized Provider	VCBH
Moderate	Primary Care Provider	Carelon BH	Authorized Provider	VCBH Comm. Clinics
Mild	Primary Care Provider	Carelon BH	Authorized Provider	Comm. Clinics Private Practice

Fuente de Pago del Seguro				
	Seguro Privado	Medi-Cal/GC	Medicare	Sin Seguro
Severo	Proveedor de Atención Primaria	VCBH	Proveedor Autorizado	VCBH
Moderado	Proveedor de Atención Primaria	Carelon BH	Proveedor Autorizado	VCBH Clínicas Comunitarias
Leve	Proveedor de Atención Primaria	Carelon BH	Proveedor Autorizado	Clínicas Comunitarias Seguro Privado

Engagement Process Updates

Actualización del Proceso de Participación

Engagement Updates

Actualizaciones de Participación



Community

- In-depth Interviews
- Listening Sessions
- Community Health Survey

Comunidad

- Entrevistas en Profundidad
- Sesiones de Escucha
- Encuesta de Usuarios de Servicios



Provider/Stakeholder

- In-depth interviews
- Provider Survey

Proveedor/Parte Interesada

- Entrevistas en Profundidad
- Encuesta de Proveedores

Provider Engagement - Interviews

Participación del Proveedor: Entrevistas

- Conducted 45 interviews with 69 individuals
 - 86% of participating agencies service both east and west county residents
 - Both Mental Health and Substance Use providers
 - 97% of participating agencies reported services can be provided in Spanish
- Se llevaron a cabo 45 entrevistas con 69 personas
 - 86% de las agencias participantes brindan servicio a los residentes del este y oeste del condado
 - Tanto los proveedores de salud mental como los de consumo de sustancias
 - 97% de las agencias participantes informaron que los servicios se pueden brindar en español

Preliminary Themes: Provider Interviews

Temas Preliminares: Entrevistas con Proveedores

Provider Engagement: Interview Themes

Participación del Proveedor: Temas de la Entrevista

- Mental Health and Substance Use Issues
- Barriers to Care
- Services Needs / Gaps to Services
- Recommendations

- Problemas de Salud Mental y Uso de Sustancias
- Barreras a la Atención
- Necesidades de Servicios / Brechas en los Servicios
- Recomendaciones

Mental Health and Substance Use Conditions

Condiciones de Salud Mental y Uso de Sustancias

Specific mental health conditions

- Schizophrenia
- Bipolar Disorder
- Depression
- Others

Specific substance use conditions

- Opioids
- Stimulants

Specific mental health conditions

- Esquizofrenia
- Desorden Bipolar
- Depresión
- Otros

Condiciones Específicas de Uso de Sustancias

- Opioides
- Estimulantes

Mental Health and Substance Use Issues

Problemas de Salud Mental y Uso de Sustancias



Access to treatment



Acceso a tratamientos



Timeliness of treatment



Puntualidad del tratamiento



Collaboration and coordination



Colaboración y coordinación



Support for vulnerable populations



Apoyo a poblaciones vulnerables

Barriers

Barreras

- Access and Availability of Services
 - Stigma and Shame
 - Transportation
 - Systemic Issues
 - Mental Health:
 - Cultural and Linguistic Barriers
 - Responsiveness and Knowledge of Providers
 - Substance Use:
 - Lack of Information or Resources
- Acceso y Disponibilidad de Servicios
 - Estigma y Vergüenza
 - Transporte
 - Problemas Sistémicos
 - Salud Mental:
 - Barreras Culturales y Lingüísticas
 - Capacidad de Respuesta y Conocimiento de los Proveedores
 - Uso de sustancias:
 - Falta de Información o Recursos

Mental Health Service Needs / Gaps to Services

Necesidades de Servicios de Salud Mental / Brechas de Servicios

- Improved access to mental health services
 - Crisis services and crisis interventions
 - Housing and continuity of care
 - Mental health needs in the legal system
- Mejor acceso a los servicios de salud mental
 - Servicios de crisis e intervenciones de crisis
 - Vivienda y continuidad de atención
 - Necesidades de salud mental en el sistema legal

Substance Use Service Needs / Gaps to Service

Necesidades de Servicios de Uso de Sustancias / Brechas de Servicios

- Expanded local treatment options
 - Focus on specific populations
 - Opioid/Stimulant Use and Medication-Assisted Treatment
 - Access to services and continuity of care
 - Prevention, education, and awareness
- Ampliación de las opciones de tratamiento local
 - Enfócate en poblaciones específicas
 - Uso de opioides/estimulantes y tratamiento asistido por medicamentos
 - Acceso a los servicios y continuidad de la atención
 - Prevención, educación y concientización

Provider Interviews: Recommendations

Entrevistas a Proveedores: Recomendaciones

- Increase staffing/ funding
- Enhance crisis services
- Foster additional collaborations and partnerships
- Focus on prevention and early intervention
- Address disparities and cultural competence
- Improve Access and timeliness
- Staff training and retention



- Aumentar el personal/ financiamiento
- Mejorar los servicios de crisis
- Fomentar colaboraciones y asociaciones adicionales
- Foco en la prevención y la intervención temprana
- Abordar disparidades y competencia cultural
- Mejorar el acceso y la puntualidad
- Capacitación y retención del personal



Listening Sessions: Community Engagement

Sesiones de Escucha: Participación Comunitaria

- 5 listening sessions with 90 individuals
- 4/5 facilitated in Spanish
- Ages 14-64 (average 27)
- Geographically Diverse
- Upcoming:
 - Veterans
 - LGBTQIA

- 5 sesiones de escucha con 90 personas
- 4/5 facilitado en Español
- Edades 14-64 (promedio 27)
- Geográficamente Diversa
- Próximo:
 - Veteranos
 - LGBTQIA

Community Listening Sessions: Barriers

Sesiones de Escucha Comunitaria: Barreras

- Stigma and Fear
- Lack of Awareness and Information
- Access and Availability Issues
- Financial Barriers
- Cultural and Linguistic Barriers

- Estigma y Miedo
- Falta de Conciencia e Información
- Problemas de Acceso y Disponibilidad
- Barreras Financieras
- Barreras Culturales y Lingüísticas

Community Listening Sessions: Recommendations

Sesiones de Escucha Comunitaria: Recomendaciones

- Education and Prevention
- Community Engagement
- Language and Cultural Competency
- Funding/Resource Allocation
- Collaboration and Partnerships
- Accessible and Localized Services
- Supportive Community Networks



- Educación y Prevención
- Participación de la Comunidad
- Competencia Lingüística y Cultural
- Asignación de Fondos/Recursos
- Colaboración y Asociaciones
- Servicios Accesibles y Localizados
- Redes Comunitarias que Apoyan



Thank You | Gracias

Contact Us | Contáctenos

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Director's Update

BHAB General Meeting 8.21.2023

General Updates:

- **September has the following days of significance to highlight:**
 - Suicide Prevention Month
 - National Suicide Prevention Week: September 10-16
 - Recovery Month
 - Labor Day – September 4
 - World Suicide Prevention Day – September 10
 - Grandparents Day – September 10
 - Hispanic Heritage Month – September 15 – October 15
 - National Opioid & Substance Awareness Day – September 21

Due to Smart Care, there will be no Active Consumers Data Report

Adult Services Division:

- The Adult Division launched its Short-Term Treatment Teams on 8/7/23. This short-term treatment approach is taking the place of STAR and its centralized triage and assessment. Persons seeking services from VCBH will continue to be screened by Access line staff; however, those appearing to meet admission criteria will be referred directly the nearest clinic for follow up. Recent CalAIM changes allow for more problem-focused, initial appointments. Each clinic will have their own Short-Term Treatment Team which will see referrals in a timely manner as either “walk-ins” or at schedule times. The nature and course of treatment with the Short-Term Treatment team is expected vary from client-to-client but will include psychiatric services (including medication when warranted). Those clients who follow up and require extended care will be transferred to the regular clinic or “Long-Term Treatment Team”.
- The 8th Annual Suicide Prevention Forum is scheduled to take place Tuesday, September 12, 2023, at Oxnard College (see attached flier). This year’s theme is “Pathways to Hope and Healing” and the keynote speaker is Gabe Teran, Youth Development & Advocacy Consultant. The event is free, but registration in advance is requested. The forum will run from 4:00 pm to 8:00 pm and dinner will be provided.

Youth and Family (Y&F) Services Division:

Division Highlights

- The Y&F Division has hired a Peer Services Specialist for our new Youth Full-Service Partnership (FSP). This is the first Peer ever to be hired in the Y&F Division and we are thrilled to add this important voice and skill set to the treatment team.

Initiatives and Progress

- BH Manager Ana Magbitang and Clinic Administrators from Santa Paula/Fillmore, Simi, and North and South Oxnard clinics met with Ashley Nettles to set up process regarding overdose education and provision of Overdose Prevention Kits to our families as requested. Next step is for Ashley to meet with each team separately, provide further training and the kits for distribution.
- The Y&F Division is pleased to announce the Youth FSP is fully developed and serving West County and is now able to implement a soft launch for East County. The FSP will provide increased and enhanced field-based services to our highest acuity, unserved or underserved youth (ages 0-21) and their families.

Collaborations

- CA Kat Baca Leanos and BH Manager Ana Magbitang attended a monthly collaborative meeting with Vista Real Charter School (7/11/23) to learn more about their program, discuss how to improve collaboration on youth to which we both provide services, as well as provide update on changes with intake process for VCBH.
- CalWORKs clinicians continue to facilitate weekly workshops on a variety of topics (depression, anxiety, communication, life balance) to welfare to work recipients. Our clinicians are co-located at Human Services Agency sites throughout the county and collaborate closely with our partnering agency to meet the mental health needs of the CalWORKs population.
- CAs Daniella Bednarz and Stephanie Cowie collaborated with VCOE and Aspiranet to train staff on the provision of Educationally Related Social Emotional Services.
- BH Manager Monica Torres along with a SUS staff provided Adult Mental Health First Aid to a diverse group of county employees on 6/20/23.

Training & Conferences

- n/a

Substance Use Services (SUS) Division:

DHCS SUD integrated Care Conference in Long Beach:

VCBH representatives from all units in SUS as well as Quality Care and SPA attended the DHCS SUD integrated Care Conference in Long Beach August 15-17. The conference was an opportunity for the behavioral health, treatment, and recovery workforce to network and learn about important and emerging issues and trends, and program outcomes in SUD prevention. The multisession conference showcased SUD service delivery systems that advance the goals of California Advancing and Innovating Medi-Cal (CalAIM); focused on community change and solutions that address the opioid epidemic; highlighted promising, evidence-based practices; provided training opportunities; and supported workforce development.

Prevention:

- **Piru community receives “Five Facts on Fentanyl” and Overdose Prevention resources.**
 - The Piru Neighborhood Council meeting invited Prevention services to share information and resources at their meeting of July 19 at 7 p.m.
 - A brief presentation on fentanyl risks included Overdose Prevention basics and an overview of Overdose Rescue kits available for free to residents.
 - Of the 26 attendees, 13 folks left the meeting naloxone kits, and an understanding of how to identify and respond to an opioid overdose.

- **Local non-profits join Fentanyl test strip rollout.**
 - On Wednesday July 26, we hosted a meeting for agencies interested in test strips to reduce the risk of accidental fentanyl exposure, as a hybrid in-person and virtual event.
 - Response was VERY strong, with Ventura County Fire, One Step a la Vez, and a range of other non-profit organizations signing up to be distribution partners.
 - Messaging about available resources, local treatment options, and how to respond to an overdose were discussed, and 10 agencies are preparing to partner with VCBH to get test strips out to our communities.
 - Learn more about Test Strips orientation with hands-on training for programs who want to make test kits available to people who might otherwise not be aware that Fentanyl is in their drug. Visit: www.VenturaCountyResponds.org

- **UPCOMING from COAST– Fentanyl Town Hall at VCOE**
 - Mark your calendars for Wednesday evening, September 27th for a discussion of Fentanyl and the current Opioid Crisis, Featuring a panel of local leaders:

- Medical Examiner Dr. Christopher Young,
- District Attorney Erik Nasarenko
- Substance Use Services Division Chief Raena West
- Sheriff Jim Fryhoff
- Light dinner provided; parents and community members welcome, 150 expected.
- Register at Eventbrite.com – see “Facing Down Fentanyl”

Treatment Services:

- SUS operations staff have been navigating the new HER - SmartCare. CAs are working to create workflows with the input of staff.
- New Addiction Medicine Fellows have started at the MAT clinic and have been trained in the new EHR.
- Sublocade will be provided at the Oxnard SUTS clinic. Sublocade Room at the Oxnard clinic is tentatively ready to go in the next 6-8 weeks.

DUI Services:

On August 11, 2023 VCBH issued a request for proposals (RFP) for the DUI program. Ventura is the last county in California to directly operate a DUI program. Over the past years our labor costs have gone up making the service too costly to directly operate without raising our fees. Because we already have the highest fee structure in the state, raising fees even higher would present an undue hardship for participants. We believe transitioning to a model used by other counties of contracting with a provider is the best option. Our goal is to offer the same level of service, lower the cost for participants and expand local operating hours beyond our current offerings.

If there are bidders, the new provider(s) must go through the DHCS application process which could take another six (6) months after the three (3) month RFP process. VCBH will continue to operate the DUI program until we have secured an acceptable contractor to provide services. VCBH intends to absorb all DUI staff into other VCBH clinics or programs.

Quality Division:

Quality Assurance:

- QA SmartCare SuperUsers are actively testing new EHR screens to provide guidance to Operations Teams. QA has sent out a Reference Guide for VCBH staff and contracting CBOs related to payment reform implementation. The QA Team is supporting both MH and DMC-ODS providers with compliance efforts through the ongoing Monthly QA Office Hours (Zoom meeting). QA is maintaining a working CalAIM FAQ page for VCBH Clinics and CBOs that assists in answering

regulation related questions. The Site Certification Team continues to collaborate with Fiscal Department to work toward Medicare provider status for VCBH. QA reviews SUS Treatment Authorization Requests for approval and is testing SmartCare screens to make the process as efficient as possible. QA supervises the Medical Records Unit related to subpoenas and records requests. Grievances and appeals from beneficiaries are being addressed, resolved, and tracked for quality improvement.

- **VCBH Policy Office:** Policy Office continues to lead the Fiscal policy development workgroup to support Fiscal and Billing teams in further development of policies to support Payment Reform roll out effective July 1st, 2023, and Fiscal operations thereafter, in compliance with regulatory and contractual obligations. The first Fiscal policy (Use of Funds) resulting from this effort was finalized, approved, published, and distributed for training. This policy also satisfied the BHQIP deliverable requirement for implementing Intergovernmental Transfers and will be submitted to DHCS accordingly, by August 15th. Additionally, Policy Office concluded its assessment of Policy Stat as the policy library and identified SharePoint as the less costly and more flexible repository. Policy Office has engaged some contracted providers to test the proposed solution before implementation. This effort is ongoing. Finally, Policy Office continues to work with the Office of Health Equity and Cultural Diversity to establish an operational guideline for use of language and public-facing documents to create more accessible and equitable policies and materials in support of Behavioral Health integration.
- **Utilization Review:** The UR team continues to evaluate and manage the medical necessity, appropriateness, and efficiency of the behavioral health services provided to our clients. In addition, UR continuously collaborates with various stakeholders, VCBH and CBO providers, including acute inpatient psychiatric hospitals, to make informed decisions about patient care, resource allocation, and documentation compliance that adheres to relevant clinical guidelines, policies, and regulations. UR continuously evaluates the SmartCare system and CalMHSA UR Tools and recommends necessary changes. Lastly, UR will continuously evaluate SmartCare performance and user feedback and provide essential support to ensure documentation accuracy and compliance with Payment Reform and CalAIM requirements.
- **Training:** VCBH Internship Program is onboarding 32 students (undergraduate, graduate and doctoral) to support services county wide and promote recruitment efforts. Recently 3 of the 11 2022-2023 students have been hired.
- The 2022-2023 Training Plan is being reviewed to ensure completion and inform future Training Planning.
- SCRP grant funds are being used to offer a Clinical Supervision conference in October 2023 to acknowledge the skills and dedication of our Clinical Supervisors. VCBH will be identifying and sending 12 VCBH Clinical Supervisors to attend – hoping to identify staff who have provided exceptional service by supporting numerous clinicians’ professional growth through the provision of Clinical Supervisor.

Quality Improvement:

- **Audits & Reviews:** The QI team is leading all audits, reviews, and corrective action plans (CAPs) for the department. We are beginning to prepare for the DHCS MHP Triennial and DMC-ODS/SABG Annual Review, now referred to as the DHCS County-Specific Engagement. The date has been changed and will now begin October 16th (with a 7–10-day review period) instead of occurring in August, more information forthcoming. We are also supporting the MHSA Program Review (September 26-28); all pre-visit documents have been submitted to DHCS. The FY 23-24 MHP and DMC-ODS External Quality Review (EQRO) has been set for December 5-7.
- **Quality Improvement Committee:** Initial Quality Improvement Committee (QIC) meetings and subcommittee meetings have occurred under this new/revised structure for ongoing quality management monitoring and use of data-driven decision making across the department. This process involves different 7 focus areas and includes VCBH staff at all levels as well as contractors and community partners.
- **PIPS:** QI now has 5 performance improvement projects (PIPs) that address various areas for improvement. We have developed interventions for 3 new PIPs specific to CalAIM-related shifts in measuring specific items to follow-up after an emergency room visit and adherence to Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT). In addition, we are developing a new MH PIP to support identification of individuals who should be enrolled in VCPOP and a SUS PIP on engagement in services continues.
- **Performance Metric Tracking:** QI is building out ongoing tracking and reporting of key performance metrics and is working with VC-Information Technology Services to design a public-facing data dashboard. The initial phase of development will be completed soon, with further metrics added in the future.

Electronic Health Record:

- **CalMHSA EHR SmartCare:** SmartCare launched on July 1, 2023. During the first two weeks of the launch, the EHR team held twice daily zoom meetings for superusers and managers to address immediate issues. This was done as part of the overall Command Center established to support Go-Live. Since then, the EHR and Billing teams have been handling issues through a Service Now ticket system. This helps track ongoing system issues and troubleshoot problems. Right now, the project is in the Stabilization phase. During this phase we have been developing job aides to help address issues that multiple parties are having. We will continue to work with CalMHSA to address broken workflows and system issues. We are also working with operations to identify areas for additional training and guidance.
- **Data Gaps Analysis:** EHR and QI are working to establish an interim solution for data needs that will not be in Smartcare, while longer term solutions are being assessed and evaluated.

- **Trainings:** In-person and Zoom trainings began the first week of June and will carry through mid-July. Additional trainings and/or QA sessions will be continued through July.

California Advancing and Innovating Medi-Cal:

- VCBH's CalAIM unit (California Advancing and Innovating Medi-Cal) continues to coordinate CalAIM efforts across the department. The CalAIM team's support includes providing technical support in a variety of ways to both staff and contracted providers; and ongoing communication and collaboration with contracted county partners and the local managed care health plan continue to help facilitate a smooth implementation experience.

August 2023: Strategic Initiatives

- VCBH continues to focus on the transition to the new Electronic Health Record (SmartCare). The VCBH EHR team is working collaboratively with CalMHSA and the EHR vendor to resolve technical issues on a regular basis. In addition, the EHR team continues to hold weekly Superuser check-ins to answer staff questions and help clarify workflows. The weekly Superuser check-ins will extend through August with the possibility of an additional extension if needed. In addition, CalMHSA has been continuously updating their SmartCare website to into various user-specific quick guides and FAQs to help users navigate the system.
- VCBH has submitted the DHCS BHQIP August 15th submission related to the Department of Health Care Services' policies and associated processes related to Behavioral Health Intergovernmental Transfers (IGT). VCBH is currently working on collecting the necessary documentation for the required BHQIP deliverables due September 29, 2023.

VCBH Adult Division placements as of 8/11/23

Level	Facility	Location	Available beds	Clients in placement
Locked	Horizon View	Camarillo	16	15
	Sylmar Health & Rehabilitation Center	Sylmar	n/a	22
	California Psychiatric Transitions	Delhi	n/a	1
	Crestwood MHRC	Bakersfield	n/a	2
	Parkside Healthcare	El Cajon	n/a	20
	View Heights	Los Angeles	n/a	33
Total				93
Unlocked	Hillmont House	Camarillo	15	15
	Crestwood The Bridge	Bakersfield	n/a	1
	Ann Sippi Clinic, Bakersfield	Bakersfield	12	12
	Ann Sippi Clinic, Los Angeles	Los Angeles	12	8
	Casa de Esperanza (Casas B, C, and D)	Camarillo	45	45
Total				81
Board & Cares	Casa de Esperanza (Casa E)	Camarillo	15	15
	Brown's Board & Care	Oxnard	10	10
	Cottonwood	Saticoy	24	20
	Sandra Jarmon's	Oxnard	6	3
	Sunrise Manor	Oxnard	60	46
	Thompson Place (formerly La Siesta)	Ventura	26	26
Total				120
Residential Care for the Elderly	The Elms	Ventura	54	43
	Oak Place (formerly Hickory House)	Camarillo	34	37
Total				80
Skilled Nursing Facilities	Telecare La Paz	Paramount	n/a	7
	Pasadena Senior Living	Pasadena	n/a	1
	Vista Knoll	Vista	n/a	8
Total				15

PREVENTING SUICIDE

8th Annual Forum

Pathways to Hope and Healing

KEYNOTE

GABE TERAN, MS

Youth Development &
Advocacy Consultant



Suicide touches us all. Join us for this community-wide event. Find connections and support in personal stories, wellness activities and local resources.

Tuesday, September 12
4PM – 8PM

- 4PM Resource Tables
- 4:30PM – 7:30PM Main Event
- Dinner Provided

Oxnard College
Performing Arts Building

4000 South Rose Avenue, Oxnard

A Tale of Two Journeys

Keynote Speaker Gabe Teran, a lifelong resident of Ventura County, will share his own journey of loss and grief after the death of a family member by suicide – followed by another journey, one of hope and healing. Through sharing these two journeys, he hopes that others can find strength in navigating their own.

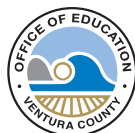


REGISTER NOW
for this Free Event!

www.brite.link/forum2023

Spanish and ASL interpretation will be available.

For more information, email
mhsa@ventura.org or call 805-981-5447.



For suicide prevention resources, visit: www.WellnessEveryDay.org

Funding is made through Ventura County Behavioral Health, Mental Health Services Act.

Ventura County Behavioral Health Advisory Board

August 2023 Secretary's Report

❖ *There is one new opening for a BHAB member in Supervisor Gorell's office – District 2*

Announcements:

Time Sensitive: On **September 12th**, the 8th Annual Suicide Prevention, "Pathways to Healing" will take place at Oxnard College Performing Arts Center 4000 South Rose Avenue, Oxnard from **4:00-8:00 p.m.**

Walk with Us, "Out of The Darkness to Prevent Suicide," will take place at the Ventura Pier on **September 23rd**, check in is at **9:00 am**.

With over 181 deaths in V.C. from Fentanyl in 2022, public and private agencies are working harder than ever to stop this epidemic. **On September 27th 6:00-7:30 p.m.**, at the Ventura County Office of Education at 5100 Adolfo Road in Camarillo, VCBH and the Superintendent of Schools Dr. Caesar Morales will be hosting a "Facing Down Fentanyl Town Hall" for the community. Community members are invited to learn the latest about the continuing fentanyl crisis and how county agencies are pulling together to stop this epidemic, dinner and refreshments will be serviced. More information will be forthcoming in September.

1. On July 25th, Ventura County Board of Supervisors approved \$1.62 in funding for supportive shelter services in the Santa Clara Valley. The combined City and County funding will service individuals who are experiencing homelessness. BHAB member, Nomi Marufo is the General Manager at the "Spirit Of Santa Paula" shelter and the recipient of the funding. <https://spiritofsantapaula.org>
2. **CALIFORNIA AWARDS \$12.1 MILLION FOR OPIOID AND STIMULANT USE**

SACRAMENTO – As part of Governor Gavin Newsom's \$1 billion [Master Plan for Tackling the Fentanyl and Opioid Crisis](#), the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) has awarded \$12.1 million to [54 entities](#) through the Opioid and Stimulant Use Disorder Prevention for Communities of Color Project.

"Awardees will use their funding to increase community understanding of opioid, stimulant, and polysubstance use, reduce stigma, and increase access to treatment services through referrals and partnerships," said **DHCS Director Michelle Baass**.

PROJECT GOALS: The project directs funding to entities that have demonstrated they can effectively and equitably serve individuals in Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities who are disproportionately impacted by the negative consequences of drug use and the criminalization of substance use disorders (SUD). These communities include Native American, African American, Latino, and Asian-Pacific Islander communities and often have less access to treatment and information about opioid and stimulant use and supports.

1. The project is designed to overcome gaps in access through the following expected outcomes¹. Increase individual and community understanding of opioids and opioid use, stimulants and stimulant use, and/or polysubstance use in BIPOC communities, prioritizing harm reduction and public health solutions that focus on positive messages to prevent SUD.

2. Reduce community and individual stigma of people who use drugs and care and treatment services.

3. Increased knowledge of treatment services, particularly Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) and stimulant use disorder treatment, including where and how to access services, as well as integrating and strengthening referral pathways to community SUD care treatment providers to prevent or stop disordered use.

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT: In California, from October 2020 through September 2021, more than 3,296 people from BIPOC communities died from opioid-related overdoses, accounting for 46% of deaths. Communities of color have faced historical and ongoing trauma, systemic racism, and criminalization.

This trauma is perpetuated by the lack of investment in community-based prevention, intervention, and treatment access, especially for culturally responsive, healing-centered, and trauma-informed approaches, and by the ongoing stigma related to seeking SUD treatment in American culture.

BROADER EFFORT: This project is part of DHCS' broader efforts to address SUDs, collectively known as the [California MAT Expansion Project](#), to increase access to MAT, reduce unmet treatment needs, and reduce opioid overdose-related deaths through the provision of prevention, treatment, and recovery activities. MAT is the use of medications in combination with counseling and behavioral therapies, which is effective in the treatment of opioid use disorders and can help some people sustain recovery. For more information, please visit the DHCS [website](#).

BIGGER PICTURE: Since coming into office, Governor Gavin Newsom has dedicated more than \$1 billion in funding to fight the opioid crisis by removing opioids from the streets, providing resources to California communities in need, and increasing education and awareness to prevent harm in the first place. In fiscal year 2022-23, DHCS invested more than \$558 million in various opioid prevention and treatment grant activities.

AWARD DETAILS: The project has a total of \$12.1 million in available funds awarded to 54 entities, with a maximum of up to \$250,000 per entity for the 12-month

contract period of July 1, 2023, through June 30, 2024.

DHCSCommunications@DHCS.CA.GOV

Please note, due to the new Brown Act Rules, all BHAB members and committee members are required to attend meetings in-person, unless otherwise excused. It is important for members to attend the meetings in order to establish a quorum. **Without a quorum the business of the board and committees cannot be done.**



150 DAYS OF CELEBRATION

Step into history and embrace the spirit of innovation, resilience, and community as Ventura County celebrates its 150th anniversary in 2023.

Upcoming Events (Partial list)

- | | |
|---------|---|
| June 23 | Kick-Off Party
Museum of Ventura County |
| July | Online Festival
Games, shows, puzzles and more!
Online at venturamuseum.org |
| Aug 4 | Pop-up Celebration at Ventura County Fair
Ventura County Fairgrounds |
| Sept 16 | Pop-up Celebration at Ragtime Revival
Strathearn Historical Park, Simi Valley |
| Sept 30 | Pop-up Celebration at the Banana Festival
105 E. Port Hueneme Rd., Port Hueneme |
| Oct 7 | Pop-Up Celebration at Moorpark Country Days
High Street, Moorpark |
| Oct 21 | Mountain to Sea Jubilee: Celebrating 150 Years of VC
Family fair and music festival including parade, games, exhibit unveiling, live music by Big Bad Voodoo Daddy and more!
Agriculture Museum, Santa Paula |
| Nov 2 | State of the County Address
Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, Simi Valley |
| Nov | Satellite Exhibit Installations
Oxnard, Simi Valley, Thousand Oaks, and Ventura |
| Nov 11 | Pop-up Celebration
Bank of America Performing Arts Center Thousand Oaks |

**More events
announced soon!**

venturacounty150.com



Ventura County Behavioral Health

Board Letter Summary of Contracts for July 2023

Board Date	Contract	Amount	Term	Description
7/11/2023	Ventura County Office of Education (VCOE)	\$8,063,710	July 1, 2023 Through June 30, 2026	<p>FY 2023-26 VCOE Amendment for School-Based Wellness Center Services. VCOE provides school-based Wellness Center services for Ventura County Behavioral Health (VCBH) utilizing Mental Health Student Services Act (MHSSA) grant funding. These school-based Wellness Centers provide service strategies within each school that increase early identification of mental health needs, reduce access barriers, and facilitate linkage to ongoing and sustained services. These Wellness Centers and the collaboration between VCBH have been held out as a model program in the state. Because of the successful MHSSA grant funded collaboration and service delivery, VCBH and VCOE developed eleven additional Wellness Centers within high schools and middle schools last fiscal year utilizing VCBH Proposition 63 Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) funding. Through the proposed First Amendment to the Agreement with VCOE for Wellness Center services, VCBH is seeking to utilize additional MHSA funding to amend the Agreement to fund efforts to create up to a total of 32 Wellness Centers. These Wellness Centers are targeting middle and elementary schools in several existing Local Education Agencies (LEAs) as well as expanding to three new school districts (Hueneme Elementary School District, Oak Park School District, and Ventura Unified School District).</p> <p>The First Amendment to the agreement with VCOE increases the maximum contract amount by \$2,063,710, to fund the expansion of services and replace the previous Scope of Work with updated project goals and outcomes. This agreement is funded by MHSA funding.</p>

MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 3, 2023

FROM: Michele Morris
Contracts Administration

SUBJECT: July 11, 2023 – Board Letter - FY 2023-26 Ventura County Office of Education- First Amendment

On July 11, 2023, Ventura County Behavioral Health (VCBH) will be requesting (1) approval and authorization for the VCBH Director or designee to sign the First Amendment to the Agreement with the Ventura County Office of Education (VCOE) to provide Wellness Center Services, to \$8,063,710 (an increase of \$2,063,710), effective July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2026; and (2) Authorization for the Auditor-Controller to process the necessary budgetary transactions (recommendation #2 Requires 4/5ths Vote).

- VCOE provides Wellness Center services for VCBH across several schools within the County. Under a previous agreement with VCOE, VCOE provided school-based Wellness Center services for VCBH utilizing Mental Health Student Services Act (MHSSA) grant funding. The Wellness Centers provide service strategies within each school that increase early identification of mental health needs, reduce access barriers, and facilitate linkage to ongoing and sustained services. These Wellness Centers and the collaboration between VCBH and VCOE have been held out as a model program in the State. Because of the successful MHSSA grant funded collaboration and service delivery, VCBH and VCOE developed eleven (11) additional Wellness Centers within high schools and middle schools last fiscal year. The proposed First Amendment to the agreement with VCOE increases the overall maximum contract amount by \$2,063,710, to furnish and open new Wellness Centers within six (6) additional middle and elementary school districts: Hueneme School District, Moorpark Unified School District, Oak Park School District, Oxnard School District, Pleasant Valley School District, and Ventura Unified School District.
- The agreement is funded with MHSA dollars.

Please sign and return the attached amendment. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to me.

Michele Morris
Contracts Administration (805) 981-5410

Ventura County has more homeless shelter beds than ever. It's still not enough



Tony Biasotti

Published 9:00 a.m. PT Aug. 9, 2023

Daisy Rodriguez was living in a tent in a dirt parking lot in Fillmore in the spring of 2022, after about 10 years of on-and-off homelessness, when police told her she couldn't stay there anymore. Her only other option, they said, was a homeless shelter in Santa Paula.

Rodriguez moved into the Spirit of Santa Paula shelter, and then, she said, "a miracle happened" — after a few months of feeling sorry for herself, she turned her life around, worked with the shelter's case managers and found a permanent home. She now rents a one-bedroom apartment in an affordable housing complex in Fillmore built by the nonprofit developer Many Mansions.

"I didn't know there was a place like Spirit of Santa Paula, where I could have my own bed, not a cot or a rug on the floor. My own space. My own things," said Rodriguez, who is 68 and retired from a job with the County of Ventura. "I had food, I had coffee, things that helped make me normal again."

Until recently, there weren't places in Ventura County like Spirit of Santa Paula: full-service, year-round homeless shelters open to anyone who needs them, with counseling, job and housing placement, and other services for residents.

For decades, the county's main homeless shelters operated in winter only. Residents slept on cots in an open room at a National Guard armory in Ventura or Oxnard, with the site usually switching between cities every year. They had to leave the facility every morning, sometimes before sunrise, and return in the evening. The Ventura shelter was an active armory, so it

had to close when the National Guard needed the building, and the Guard kept a security guard on site because it's a military weapons depot.

“Those winter warming shelters were just aimed at getting people out of the elements,” said Ventura County Supervisor Matt LaVere, who was a member of the Ventura City Council when the Ventura armory shelter was open. “There weren’t a lot of services being provided, and that’s what makes these new shelters different.”

Spirit of Santa Paula went year-round in 2019, the same year that Oxnard’s first year-round publicly funded shelter opened. Then in 2020, a year-round shelter opened in Ventura. Both Ventura's and Oxnard's are operated by the nonprofit Mercy House. Thousand Oaks is planning to open its own shelter next year, and officials in Ojai have expressed interest in one in their city.

Ventura County now has 641 emergency shelter beds, according to information provided by the County of Ventura. That's a 160% increase since 2019.

The current total includes both permanent shelters and hotel rooms rented for homeless people through Project Roomkey, a state program that started in 2020 to provide temporary housing for senior citizens and other people at elevated risk from COVID-19.

Ventura County matches local cities' funding for homeless shelters

In 2018, the Ventura County Board of Supervisors approved county funding on a dollar-for-dollar match to any city that wanted to fund a homeless shelter. The Ventura, Oxnard and Santa Paula shelters all operate with this funding model, and when the shelter in Thousand Oaks opens, it will too.

Once the Thousand Oaks shelter opens, the county and cities will spend a combined \$7 million on four publicly funded, year-round shelters, with a total of 244 beds. The county pays half the total for each shelter, and its offer remains open: to split the costs with any city that wants to open one.

“There are homeless people in every city in the county, and I would hope every city would step up and do their part,” LaVere said. “To get people off the streets permanently, we need to get them off the streets temporarily. You’re so much more effective at starting that path once you can convince them to come into shelter temporarily.”

For years, the answer to someone looking for emergency shelter in the summertime was almost always “no,” said Jenn Harkey, who oversees the county’s homelessness services as director of its Continuum of Care program. Now, it’s “sometimes yes,” she said. The shelters are almost entirely full, but there’s usually a bed somewhere for people who need one with a few days’ notice, especially if they’re referred by a police officer or social worker.

Homeless population always undercounted in annual survey

There’s a lot more emergency shelter available than there was, but it isn’t enough to keep up with the growing homelessness situation. Every year in January, the County of Ventura oversees a census of the homeless population, with social workers and volunteers counting everyone they can find without permanent housing on one specific night.

The number is always an undercount, since not every unhoused person will be found, and because it’s a single-night survey that doesn’t count someone who might be homeless at a different point in the year.

The 2023 Homeless Count found 2,441 people in Ventura County without a permanent home, more than double the number from 2017. People who live in emergency shelters are counted as homeless, but they are considered “sheltered.”

Even with hundreds more shelter beds available, the number of unsheltered people in the county keeps rising: The 2023 count found 1,633 people living without any indoor shelter, a 146% increase from 2017.

“If you look at the unsheltered population, it’s continuing to increase, so how many beds is enough? Where you do draw the line?” Harkey said.

Perhaps the biggest problem, Harkey said, is a lack of places for people to go after they leave an emergency shelter. The shelters are usually meant for three-month stays, but because permanent housing is scarce for people without incomes or with very low incomes, the average stay is closer to six months, she said.

One option is an affordable housing complex like the one Rodriguez moved into last year in Fillmore. Another is “transitional housing,” a type of longer-term temporary housing where people have their own rooms and services are geared toward moving residents into truly permanent housing.

Between 2019 and 2023, when the number of emergency shelter beds in Ventura County more than doubled, there was a slight decrease in the number of transitional housing spots, from 170 beds to 167. The main reason for a lack of transitional housing, Harkey said, is because there isn't federal funding available for it, like there is for emergency shelters.

"That was intentional at the federal level, because they really wanted to move people through shelter quickly, transitional housing is a longer-term program," she said.

'I didn't know how to get myself out of homelessness'

The state of California, though, is funding Project Homekey, a successor to the Project Roomkey pandemic program for temporary housing. The cities of Ventura, Oxnard and Thousand Oaks have all been awarded state Roomkey funds to buy motels in their cities and turn them into housing for the formerly homeless, with kitchens in the former motel rooms.

And nonprofit developers like Many Mansions and Cabrillo Economic Development Corp. are building low-cost housing, with rents that are affordable for people whose only income is Social Security or other government assistance. The Many Mansions complex in Fillmore opened last year, and Cabrillo is pursuing projects in Oxnard for farmworkers and veterans and for the formerly homeless.

With Ventura County's high housing costs, there is always excess demand for affordable housing. Navigating the system and getting a low-cost apartment is hard enough for someone staying in a homeless shelter; for someone living on the streets, it can be nearly impossible.

"It would be extremely difficult," said Joseph Alexander, who, like Rodriguez, lives in the Many Mansions building in Fillmore and moved there from the Spirit of Santa Paula shelter. "You need time, you need a place to be able to use a computer, you need to be able to print documents."

Rodriguez said she doesn't think she could have found an apartment if she had to look for one when she was living outdoors.

"I'm an intelligent person. I read, I educate myself, and I didn't know how to get myself out of homelessness," she said. "Looking for a place on my own was impossible, but the shelter

will work with you and with your income and find you a place. They know where to look, and I had no idea.”

Not all homeless shelter residents have success stories

Of course, not every shelter resident is a success story. Project Roomkey, which places people in individual motel rooms, has moved about 40% of its residents to some type of permanent housing since 2020, Harkey said.

Group shelters have similar success rates: Spirit of Santa Paula places about 40% of its residents in permanent housing when they leave, and its funding agreement with the county sets a goal of placing 75% of its residents in “acceptable living arrangements” within a year, including permanent housing, treatment facilities or living with relatives.

At the ARCH shelter in Ventura — the name stands for All Roads Connect to Housing — there are 35 beds in the men’s dormitory room, 17 in the women’s dorm, and two in a medical dorm reserved for people who are sick or intoxicated.

The facility is in a county-owned building, and it opened, with terrible timing, in late January of 2020. Within six weeks, the pandemic hit. The shelter had to reduce its capacity and still suffered a series of outbreaks, but no one became seriously ill — perhaps because the most vulnerable people were moved to motel rooms under Project Roomkey.

“It’s really well done here, and I’ve been in some other places,” said Ryan Schatz, who had been sleeping on the streets of Ventura for two years before he came to the ARCH shelter.

The other shelters he’s stayed in would make residents leave during the day. That led Schatz to spend his days drinking in the park.

“I’m an alcoholic. I wish I wasn’t,” he said.

At ARCH, he could spend his days in treatment, looking for work, dealing with his upcoming court case on a DUI charge or just watching TV in the common room.

Schatz, 48, has not been one of ARCH’s success stories. He left the shelter not long after talking to the Star about his situation, and not for permanent housing. Amanda Cruz, a program manager at ARCH, said Schatz had been asked to leave for not following the rules. She didn’t know where he’d ended up.

Like the county's other publicly funded shelters, ARCH is a "low barrier" environment, Cruz said. That means residents don't have to be sober or in treatment to stay, but there are still rules, about using drugs on the premises, causing problems while intoxicated, loitering in the shelter's neighborhood and more.

The majority of shelter residents are like Schatz, in that when they leave, it won't be for a clean, one-bedroom apartment in a new affordable housing complex. But the time spent at the ARCH shelter was still preferable to more nights sleeping in the corner of a shopping center.

"The best part is the three meals a day," Schatz said of the shelter. "No, actually, the best part is a good night's sleep. You get here and you just sleep like a baby."

Tony Biasotti is an investigative and watchdog reporter for the Ventura County Star. Reach him at tbiasotti@vcstar.com. This story was made possible by a grant from the Ventura County Community Foundation's Fund to Support Local Journalism.

Featured Weekly Ad