



**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
AGENDA LETTER**

**Agenda Number:**

**Clerk of the Board of Supervisors**  
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407  
Santa Barbara, CA 93101  
(805) 568-2240

**Submitted on:**  
**(COB Stamp)**

**Department Name:** Behavioral Wellness  
**Department No.:** 043  
**Agenda Date:** June 9, 2026  
**Placement:** Administrative Agenda  
**Estimated Time:** N/A  
**Continued Item:** No  
**If Yes, date from:**  
**Vote Required:** Majority

**TO:** Board of Supervisors  
**FROM:** Department Director: Antonette Navarro, LMFT, Director  
Department of Behavioral Wellness  
Contact: Dr. Ole Behrendtsen, Medical Director  
Department of Behavioral Wellness  
**SUBJECT:** Services Agreement with Sterling Care Psychiatric Group, Inc. for Psychiatrist Staffing Services for Fiscal Year 2026–29

**County Counsel Concurrence**

As to form: Yes

**Other Concurrence:** Risk Management

As to form: Yes

**Auditor-Controller Concurrence**

As to form: Yes

**Recommended Actions:**

That the Board of Supervisors:

- a) Approve and authorize the Chair to execute an Agreement for Services of Independent Contractor with Sterling Care Psychiatric Group, Inc. (not a local vendor) to provide locum tenens psychiatry staffing services at Behavioral Wellness facilities for a total maximum contract amount not to exceed \$2,028,900, inclusive of \$656,400 in fiscal year (FY) 2026-27, \$676,100 in FY 2027-28, \$696,400 in FY 2028-29, and contract term from July 1, 2026, through June 30, 2029;
- b) Delegate authority to the Director of the Department of Behavioral Wellness or designee to
  - i) make immaterial changes to the Agreement as provided in Section 25 of the Agreement; ii) agree to waive minimum experience requirements per Exhibit A-1; iii) suspend, delay, or interrupt services per Section 1 of Exhibit AA General Provisions Mental Health Plan Required Terms (Non-Direct Service Provider); all without altering the total maximum contract amount and without requiring the Board of Supervisors' approval of an amendment of the Agreement, subject to the Board of Supervisors' ability to rescind this delegated authority at any time; and

- c) Determine that the above-recommended actions are not a project that is subject to environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15378(b)(4), finding that the actions are governmental funding mechanisms and/or fiscal activities that will not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment.

**Summary Text:**

This item is on the agenda to request that the Board of Supervisors approve and authorize the Chair to execute an agreement for services with Sterling Care Psychiatric Group, Inc. (Sterling) for the placement of highly qualified locum tenens temporary psychiatrists and psychiatric mental health nurse practitioners in Behavioral Wellness (BWell) inpatient and outpatient facilities, during Fiscal Year (FY) 2026-27 through FY 2028-29. Sterling is a psychiatrist staffing service used to help address Behavioral Wellness psychiatrist staffing shortages. The total cost of this agreement is \$2,028,900. Approval of these actions will allow Behavioral Wellness to access contracted psychiatric personnel to cover necessary services across BWell's system of care, in order to meet State-mandated requirements.

**Discussion:**

Despite ongoing open recruitment for psychiatrists, BWell has experienced challenges in attracting and retaining qualified psychiatrists and psychiatric mental health nurse practitioners for its facilities. Contracting temporary psychiatrists and psychiatric nurse practitioners is a necessary, time-limited strategy to ensure the County meets Network Adequacy Requirements as mandated by the California Department of Health Care Services and maintains timely access to behavioral health services for our members and clients. Ongoing recruitment and retention challenges have created coverage gaps that cannot be resolved quickly through permanent hiring alone. Temporary psychiatrists and psychiatric nurse practitioners allow the County to stabilize services, reduce wait-times, and prevent service disruptions while the department pursues long-term workforce solutions. This approach supports patient care, assists existing staff, and ensures compliance with regulatory and contractual obligations. This strategy has helped BWell meet network adequacy standards.

Sterling's psychiatrists provide mandated psychiatric services in both inpatient and outpatient settings, including diagnostic and medication evaluations; prescribing psychiatric medications; reviewing, revising, and approving client assessments; and participation in the development, review, revision, and approval of client treatment plans. Sterling's psychiatric mental health nurse practitioners provide similar services. The key difference between Sterling's psychiatrists and mental health nurse practitioners is the latter do not provide services on weekends, nor do they serve as witnesses at court hearings or trials for the purposes of establishing conservatorships.

BWell requests approval from the Board of Supervisors for this Agreement to allow BWell to task Sterling to provide professionals who can provide mandated and critically needed psychiatry services across BWell's system of care, while recruitment efforts continue to fill permanent positions.

**Background:**

BWell provides a continuum of mental health services to Santa Barbara County residents.

Sterling provides locum tenens temporary staffing by placing highly qualified psychiatrists and psychiatric mental health nurse practitioners.

As noted in the Discussion section above, BWell has experienced challenges attracting and retaining qualified psychiatrists to work at its facilities. During the continuous recruitment from January 30,

2023 – February 3, 2025, we received 29 applications, of which 18 applicants met minimum qualifications and 6 of those qualified applicants were hired. Of the 12 who were not hired, the most common reason was the candidate declined the job offer. A second continuous recruitment was opened on March 12, 2025. That recruitment yielded 4 qualified applicants, and 1 candidate was extended an offer. Within the last 3 years, we have hired 7 candidates, of which 5 have separated as of January 2026 for different reasons.

BWell does not recruit for psychiatric mental health nurse practitioners, however, Sterling offers nurse practitioners who can perform many of the same services as psychiatrists, but with less cost overhead.

Santa Barbara County’s current agreement with Sterling for FY 2024-26, with a total contract amount not to exceed \$3,000,000, will be expiring on June 30, 2026.

**Performance Measure:**

Professionals under this agreement are expected to provide services according to generally accepted practices; participate in staff meetings, including medical staff meetings where appropriate; psychiatrists are part of medical staff meeting peer review; and all professionals are expected to respond appropriately to communications and clinical feedback.

**Contract Renewals:**

BWell is currently utilizing temporary medical professionals provided by Sterling. These professionals are providing services throughout the County at BWell clinics and other BWell programs. The professionals are all performing on par with the County’s civil service providers. BWell contracts with multiple locum tenens temporary medical staffing agencies, and Sterling’s rates are comparable to other providers.

With any contractor providing temporary staffing services, there is a risk that temporary personnel will make errors, engage in misconduct, or be negligent in the performance of assigned duties. BWell may cancel an assignment for cause or convenience, and Sterling provides professional liability insurance for the professionals to mitigate these risks. In addition, the County pays only the contractor’s fees when the County utilizes a healthcare professional referred by the contractor. There are no monthly fees attached to this agreement.

**Fiscal Analysis:**

Funding for the proposed locum tenens services will come from Medi-Cal (Federal) and Behavioral Health Services Act (BHSA) (State) sources. Sufficient appropriations are included in the FY 26-27 recommended budget.

Future fiscal year funding will be included in the department’s requested budget, subject to Board approval.

There is no additional cost to the General Fund.

<b>Funding Source</b>	<b>FY 2026-27</b>	<b>FY 2027-28</b>	<b>FY 2028-29</b>	<b>Total</b>
Medi-Cal (Federal)	\$328,200	\$338,050	\$348,200	<b>\$1,014,450</b>
BHSA (State)	\$328,200	\$338,050	\$348,200	<b>\$1,014,450</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$656,400</b>	<b>\$676,100</b>	<b>\$696,400</b>	<b>\$2,028,900</b>

**Special Instructions:**

Please email one (1) complete, executed copy of the above Agreement and one (1) Minute Order to [cshorb@sbcbswell.org](mailto:cshorb@sbcbswell.org) and to [bwellcontractsstaff@sbcbswell.org](mailto:bwellcontractsstaff@sbcbswell.org).

**Attachments:**

**Attachment A** – Sterling Care Psychiatric Group FY 2026-29 (Signature Required)

**Contact Information:**

Chris Shorb  
Contracts Analyst  
[cshorb@sbcbswell.org](mailto:cshorb@sbcbswell.org)