

Response to 2024 Grand Jury Report

County Executive Office

Deaths in Custody in
Santa Barbara County Jails:
Our County Jails Meet
Many Needs



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COUNTY
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FUTURE

Introduction

- On June 21, 2024, the 2023-24 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury distributed a report entitled “Deaths in Custody in Santa Barbara County Jails: Our County Jails Meet Many Needs.”
- The report focused on six deaths in custody which occurred between December 28, 2022 and December 31, 2023.
- The Board of Supervisors is required to respond to the Grand Jury reports in writing within 90 days, and is responsible for responding to Findings 5, 6, 12, and 14 and Recommendations 5, 6c, 12, and 14.
- The Sheriff was also required to respond to this report and as an elected department head, that written response was required within 60 days.

Overview

- As the Grand Jury's report acknowledges, overwhelmingly difficult circumstances exist when managing County jails that have become primary mental health institutions, drug treatment centers, and healthcare centers for incarcerated individuals.
- Grand Jury recommends that given staffing and budgetary resource constraints, creative solutions should be developed to leverage resources with other County departments, e.g., BWell, Public Defender, Public Health.
- The County is committed to implementing collaborative system improvements with the goal of strengthening oversight and supportive services for incarcerated individuals, particularly those medically at-risk or with behavioral health needs.



Contract Monitoring

Background

- On March 19, 2024, the Board approved two new medical positions in the Public Health Department (PHD) to monitor jail healthcare services
 - Quality Care Improvement (QCI) Coordinator will start work on September 30, 2024
 - Medical Advisor recruitment has been more challenging; Public Health aims to identify candidate by November 2024
- Medical Advisor will advise the Sheriff's Office, Probation, and healthcare provider on evidence-based and comprehensive healthcare services; advise on best practices and National Commission on Correctional Health Care (NCCHC) standards; evaluate services to identify needs, goals, and service plans; lead the Medical Advisory Committee (MAC) and participate in continuous quality improvement
- County is working with Health Management Associates (HMA) to support implementation of healthcare quality monitoring and improvement processes consistent with national best practice standards and the Remedial Plan
- Enforcing contractual adherence continues to rest with Sheriff and Probation

Findings and Recommendations

Finding 5: When the Public Health Medical Advisor position has been filled, this medical professional will be working with Wellpath staff at the jails.

Agree.

Recommendation 5: The Public Health Medical Advisor shall help oversee and advise treatment for medically compromised individuals entering the jails, especially during the critical first week of incarceration.

Will be implemented. Medical Advisor and QCI Coordinator will advise on and monitor quality of jail healthcare services and independently assess compliance, as well as adequacy and appropriateness of care. They will review and approve all clinical protocols, advise Wellpath and Custody staff on enhancing workflows and clinical care, especially in the first week of incarceration. Medical Advisor will co-chair death review committee and MAC; will regularly update PHD leadership.



Medically-Assisted Treatment (MAT)

Background

- MAT is the use of medications in combination with counseling/behavioral therapy to treat substance use disorder; continuing to expand services and patients served
- MAT was established at Main Jail in August 2018 and at NBJ in February 2022
 - Program grew from 11 to 33 patients in 2022 and then to 68 patients in 2023; today, 147 patients are enrolled (as of August 23, 2024)
 - At NBJ, wait list has decreased from 70+ in 2022 to 59 today (as of August 23, 2024); currently there is no wait list at Main Jail
 - Since September 2022, services have been provided to more than 700 individuals
 - Discharge planning efforts have been enhanced for MAT patients to ensure continuity of treatment once individuals are released from custody
- MAT expansion at the jails will also be addressed through the CalAIM Justice-Involved Initiative for Medi-Cal beneficiaries. BWell will also launch CalAIM Behavioral Health Linkages in fall 2024. Individuals receiving MAT services are among the target populations.

Findings and Recommendations

Finding 6: RU and DL suffered from drug addiction and died within two days of entering the jails.

Agree, based on factual determinations made by Sheriff's Office.

Recommendation 6c: The Sheriff's Office shall work with Public Health and Behavioral Wellness to increase staffing of the Medically Assisted Treatment program at both jails.

Has been implemented. Recent Wellpath contract extension includes additional MAT staffing (a Substance Use Disorder Counselor dedicated to MAT, as well as additional nursing staff to support MAT expansion).



Early Representation

Background

- The Public Defender's Office utilized Board of State and Community Corrections and Community Corrections Partnership funding to launch a three-year pilot program for Early Representation services – Reentry Early Access and Diversion for You (READY) – at the Northern Branch Jail in February 2024.
- READY provides legal representation and supportive services to individuals at the earliest case stages, addressing criminogenic needs and increasing diversion at three stages: pre-filing/pre-arraignment, in custody pending arraignment, and at arraignment. Individuals detained in jail before trial often face harsher outcomes than individuals released pretrial, including higher likelihood of incarceration and longer sentences.
- Because of early promising results of the North County pilot, Public Defender and Sheriff's staff are collaborating to launch a one-year pilot in South County.
 - To address infrastructure challenges of the Main Jail facility, the South County program will be modified from in-person meetings to scheduled teleconferences.

Findings and Recommendations

Finding 12: The Public Defender's Office currently conducts an entry interview to establish a connection with newly incarcerated persons booked into the Northern Branch Jail, which continues until the incarcerated persons are discharged.

Agree, in part. The READY program meets with many, but not all, newly incarcerated people in the NBJ. The READY team does not engage with clients until discharge, although discharge planners meet with individuals during various stages of incarceration.

Recommendation 12: The Sheriff's Office shall work with the Public Defender's Office to initiate a similar program at the Main Jail.

Will be implemented. Public Defender and Sheriff's Office staff are working to initiate Early Representation one-year pilot program at the Main Jail beginning in fall 2024. Ongoing funding will need to be identified to sustain and grow the pilot.



Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)

Background

- Healthcare services monitoring by PHD and BWell has been significantly enhanced over the past year, including changes to more closely monitor at-risk individuals when they enter the jails:
 - PHD recently increased monitoring from 5 areas to 13 areas per facility (26 total measures), with 6 areas focused specifically on intake screenings; BWell recently increased monitoring from 5 areas to 18 areas per facility (36 total measures), with 5 areas focused specifically on intake screenings
 - Monitoring tools have been further updated in recent months to include performance measures related to timeliness of referrals based on intake screenings identifying a mental health need, as well as referrals for chronic care management
- When areas are identified as out of compliance, a corrective action plan (CAP) is developed, and the Sheriff's Office is notified of the CAP
 - The CAP documents how deficiencies will be corrected, the person(s) responsible, and how future compliance will be ensured
 - The CAP is then reviewed and approved, or changes requested by PHD/BWell
 - Once the CAP is implemented, evidence of implementation is submitted to PHD/BWell to resolve CAP
 - Areas that continue to be out of compliance are brought to Sheriff's Office staff to further address
- Through the quarterly monitoring process and identification of corrective action plans by PHD and BWell, it is ultimately the responsibility of the Sheriff's Office as contract administrator to ensure that deficiencies at the jails are corrected

Findings and Recommendations

Finding 14: Five of the six deaths in this report occurred within the first three days of entering the jail. The main factors for jail deaths involved issues of inconsistent and inadequate observation.

Agree, in part. The Board agrees that five of these six deaths occurred within the first three days of entering the jail. As to cause of death factors, the Board references the Sheriff's response to the Grand Jury as the Sheriff's Office investigated each of the deaths.

Recommendation 14: The Sheriff's Office, working in conjunction with Wellpath, Behavioral Wellness and Public Health, shall have procedures in place to more closely monitor at-risk incarcerated persons when they enter the jail.

Has been implemented. Departments including Sheriff's Office, BWell, and Public Health, as well as Wellpath, meet monthly to review procedures and collaborate on ways to more closely monitor at-risk persons when they enter the jail. Ultimately, the Sheriff's Office is accountable for developing appropriate Sheriff-issued documented procedures and ensuring these procedures are consistently followed.



Questions?

Recommended Actions

- a) Consider and adopt the responses in Attachment A as the Board of Supervisors' response to the 2023-24 Grand Jury report entitled "Deaths in Custody in Santa Barbara County Jails: Our County Jails Meet Many Needs;"
- b) Authorize the Chair to sign the letter included in Attachment A, and forward the letter and responses to the Presiding Judge of Santa Barbara Superior Court; and
- c) Determine pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines 15378(b)(5) that the above actions are not a project subject to CEQA review, because they are government administrative activities that do not result in direct or indirect physical changes to the environment.