

Response to Santa Barbara County Grand Jury Report:

**“Children and Youth in Crisis -
Weathering the Storms of Mental
Disorders and Emotional
Disturbances”**

Report Summary

- Published June 13, 2019
- The Grand Jury released their report “Children and Youth in Crisis - Weathering the Storms of Mental Disorders and Emotional Disturbances” in which they concluded that there is a need for greater mental health resources in the County for children and youth.
- The Board of Supervisors are named as responders to Findings and Recommendations 1, 2, 3a, 3b, 4, 5, 6a, 6b, 6c, and 7.

Finding 1

- “There are no Crisis Stabilization Units for children and youth in Santa Barbara County as an alternative to out-of-county hospitalizations.
- The Board of Supervisors agrees with the finding.

Recommendation 1

- That the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Behavioral Wellness to pursue the establishment of a licensed Crisis Stabilization Unit that can accommodate adults, children and youth in Santa Maria.
- The Recommendation will not be implemented. The Department of Behavioral Wellness will not be implementing a Crisis Stabilization Unit (CSU), as a CSU is not the best model for Santa Barbara County needs due to both the length of stay limitations as well as services allowed within a CSU and fiscal sustainability considerations. The Department is working to implement an alternative model of crisis stabilization beds by developing agreements with Short Term Residential Therapeutic Programs (STRTP) for crisis stabilization beds.

Finding 2

- There are no licensed Temporary Shelter Care Facilities for children and youth in Santa Barbara County as an alternative to out-of-county hospitalizations.
- The Board of Supervisors agrees with the finding.

Recommendation 2

- That the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Behavioral Wellness to explore partnerships with community agencies to sponsor and maintain licensed Temporary Shelter Care Facilities for children and youth in Santa Barbara County.
- The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, by October of 2020. The Department is currently working in partnership with the County Department of Social Services to develop a Request For Proposals for Therapeutic Foster Care which will be issued in October 2019. These services are reimbursable through Medi-Cal.

Finding 3

- The crisis call-in phone service and mobile crisis staff of both the contracted provider SAFTY and the Department of Behavioral Wellness' ACCESS 24/7 Mobile Crisis teams often do not respond to the scene of a crisis or return phone calls in a timely manner.
- The Board of Supervisors disagrees partially with the finding. At times, mobile crisis staff were not able to respond in a timely manner; however, this issue has been corrected by expanding staffing and co-locating the Access Screening Team to a centralized location.

Recommendation 3a

- That the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Behavioral Wellness to establish and implement measurable response times, and to track and evaluate the efficacy of their crisis response services.
- The Recommendation has been implemented. While components of this finding may have been valid at the time the investigation was conducted, it is no longer accurate. Since the investigation was conducted, the Access Screening Team has been co-located to a centralized location and has expanded staffing.

Recommendation 3b

- That the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Behavioral Wellness to require its contracted partner SAFTY to respond in the field for face-to-face evaluations more quickly and frequently.
- The Recommendation has been implemented. Behavioral Wellness met with Casa Pacifica (contractor for the SAFTY program) in the summer of 2018 to address this concern. As a result of this conversation, SAFTY has increased direct care staffing in the field to improve response time as well as the ability to respond in person rather than over the phone.

Finding 4

- The SAFTY mobile crisis workers do not write 5585 holds in a timely manner because they lack authority to do so without first consulting a supervisor.
- The Board of Supervisors agrees with the finding.

Recommendation 4

- That the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Behavioral Wellness to require the crisis response staff of their contracted partner, SAFTY, to receive more training to acquire the authority to write 5585 holds independently and in a timely manner.
- The Recommendation has been implemented. While this finding may have been valid at the time the investigation was conducted, it is no longer accurate. The recommended training for SAFTY was completed in December of 2018. While the time taken to hospitalize a youth on a 5585 hold takes longer than would be the case for adults, Casa Pacifica has embedded training on actions which can expedite this process.

Finding 5

- The Department of Behavioral Wellness does not keep readily accessible data on the numbers of children on 5585 holds hospitalized out of County, where they are sent, their length of stay in each facility, and the cost of their treatment.
- The Board of Supervisors disagrees wholly with this finding. Behavioral Wellness tracks the data referenced, including the number of children on 5585 holds hospitalized out of County, their location, length of stay in each facility, and the cost of their treatment. This data can be made available to the Grand Jury if still desired.

Recommendation 5

- That the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Behavioral Wellness to design and implement a computerized record of the 5585 holds that are written, where the children are hospitalized out of County, their length of stay in each facility, and the cost of their treatment.
- This Recommendation has been implemented. The Department began compiling this data through the Quality Care Management Department in 2014. Behavioral Wellness tracks the data referenced, including the number of children on 5585 holds hospitalized out of County, their location, length of stay in each facility, and the cost of their treatment.

Finding 6

- The Children's Triage Program staff interacts with children and youth in crisis and their families in the Emergency Rooms and works to ensure community re-integration and linkage to behavioral health services upon discharge from the ER or psychiatric hospitals.
- The Board of Supervisors agrees with the finding.

Recommendation 6a

- That the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Behavioral Wellness to evaluate the efficacy of the new Crisis Triage Program by keeping statistics on the number of children served and process outcomes.
- The Recommendation has been implemented. The Children's Crisis Triage Program began in January 2019. As this is a grant funded program, evaluation of efficacy, outcome measurement and data tracking is required.

Recommendation 6b

- That the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Behavioral Wellness to continue to pursue the full implementation of the Children's Triage Program in South County.
- This Recommendation will not be implemented as it not warranted as the Department began implementation of a modified model for children's triage in August of 2019. Cottage Health and the Children's Crisis Triage Program staff will be working collaboratively to coordinate care for all youth and family experiencing a mental health crisis that requires intervention in Cottage Health's Santa Barbara emergency department.

Recommendation 6c

- That the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Behavioral Wellness to integrate the funding of the Children's Triage Program into the Department of Behavioral Wellness budget on an ongoing basis.
- This Recommendation requires further analysis. The Department of Behavioral Wellness has a positive history of sustainability of grant-funded programs. The Department has every intent of working to sustain the Children's Crisis Triage program after the end of the 3-year grant funding period. The analysis of the ability to sustain funding will be taking place during the period of the grant life and exploring other funding options, which arise over time.

Finding 7

- On-line, comprehensive information on mental health services, community supports and resources for children and youth who are experiencing a crisis in Santa Barbara County is not readily available on a central website.
- The Board of Supervisors disagrees wholly with this finding. The Department of Behavioral Wellness website includes this information
(www.countyofsb.org/behavioral-wellness)

Recommendation 7

- That the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Behavioral Wellness to design, post and keep current an on-line dashboard that provides comprehensive contact information on mental health services and community resources for children and youth in all geographic areas of Santa Barbara County, and publicize this resource to the community at large.
- This Recommendation has been implemented. Information on resources for children and youth is publicized on the Behavioral Wellness website, shared in monthly Director's Reports, at monthly outreach events/resource tables, shared through public speaking engagements and trainings, and shared through the school system with students, parents and teachers.

Recommended Actions:

- a) Consider and adopt the responses set forth in Attachment A as the Board of Supervisors' response to the 2018-2019 Grand Jury report entitled "Children and Youth in Crisis, Weathering the Storms of Mental Disorders and Emotional Disturbances," Attachment B; and
- 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 County Superior Court; and
- c) Determine pursuant to CEQA Guidelines 15378(b)(5) that the above actions are not a project subject to CEQA review, because it is a government administrative activity that does not result in direct or indirect physical changes to the environment.