

February 26, 2020

Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission
1325 J Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: El Dorado County Community HUBS Project

Dear MHSOAC Chair and Members:

In 2014, while still serving as an El Dorado County Supervisor, we began the process of developing a strategic plan. This effort continued with the current board and last year a strategic plan was adopted which includes a vision of “safe, healthy, and vibrant communities, respecting our natural resources and historical heritage.” One of the strategic goals deals with healthy communities which focuses improving the health, well-being and self-sufficiency of El Dorado County communities, residents and visitors. Specifically, within this strategic goal is achieving “better outcomes for children, young adults and families in the areas of mental illness and substance abuse prevention.” El Dorado County’s Community HUBS Project is consistent with the County’s strategic goals. The Board of Supervisors unanimous vote in favor of modifying the program is further indicative of their support of this program and its consistency with this strategic goal.

My name is Norma Santiago, and, I, currently serve as a member of El Dorado County Behavioral Health Commission. I am the author of the report dated June 12, 2019, which is included in the letters of support in your packet. This report describes my evaluation of the Community Hubs project and the reasoning behind my support of this important project. This analysis was part of the discussion that lead to the majority of the commission voting in favor of the modification of the program. Included in that majority is Supervisor John Hidahl, who is the Board of Supervisors’ representative on the commission and Co-President of NAMI Karis Holman, who along with Co-President Fred Hjerpe have provided a letter on behalf of NAMI EDC’s Board of Directors in support of the continuation of the community hubs. Our decision to support the extension of the program was after a lively discussion that included many of the points that were included in the Dr. Clevere’s letter to this commission as well as those provided by Jeanne Nelson then President of NAMI.

We, the *majority* of EDC BHC Commission, appreciate the concerns voiced by the opposition; however, as a result of our discussion, it was very clear that there are systems in place that address these concerns plus a commitment to implement additional processes to improve service delivery. There is, though, one clarification. According to the MHSOAC minutes of the recent meeting, Dr. Clavere stated, “it (the El Dorado County Behavioral Health Commission) believes that the MHSA share should be much more closely proportionate to the results, specifically to the number of actual mental health referrals made.” I want to be very clear; the Behavioral Health Commission majority did **not** indicate support of a proportional share of MHSA funding; quite the contrary, they supported the staff’s recommendation of expending “up to \$2,158,704 in MHSA Innovation funds over an additional nine months in support of the Community Based Engagement and Support Services (aka HUBS) innovation project.”

As I stated in my previous comments, it is important to remember that this program is an intervention and prevention program and the structure of the Community Hubs has been recognized as being innovative. The Family Engagement Specialists (FES), as part of the Community Hub team, provide an opportunity to connect community members to needed services including mental health. The FES is part of the first line of defense in preventing early indicators from morphing into more serious problems that can lead to the need for more costly services which is a major objective of a prevention program. Public Health Nurses do the appropriate health **and** mental health screenings to help families receive the help they need. I don't believe there is any disagreement that there are issues; however, as is made clear in the staff analysis and the County's modification request, this additional funding will help address the issues dealing with staffing; limited family engagement staff; technology and infrastructure; and analysis of data and reporting.

In the minutes of the last meeting, many MHSOAC Commissioners expressed many concerns regarding this program and if it is in keeping the spirit of MHSA. In a revision of the Mental Health Services Act dated January 27, 2020 under the section titled INNOVATION, it states:

"Part 3.2 (commencing with Section 5830) is added to Division 5 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, to read" and it goes on to describe and further define the varying aspects of an innovative program. Section 5320 (b) lists all the requirements that are to be included in the innovative program portion of the county plan. While this project meets those requirements, for the purpose of this discussion, I would like to focus on paragraph 2 of this section. It states: "Support innovative approaches by doing **one** of the following..." Community-Based Engagement and Supportive Services AKA Community Hubs does **three**:

Community Hubs do:

- Introduce "new mental health practices or approaches, including, but not limited to, prevention and early intervention."
- Make "a change to an existing mental health practice or approach, including, but not limited to, adaptation for a new setting or community."
- Introduce "a new application to the mental health system of a promising community-driven practice or an approach that has been successful in nonmental health contexts or settings."

If El Dorado County is to build the healthy communities as outlined in its strategic plan, it must rely on building relationships within those communities not only through its own efforts; but, also, by effectively working with its agency partners. Through these partnerships there is an opportunity to build the capacity to address the communities' needs. Equally important is that in order to effectively respond to a mental health crisis, a holistic approach for treatment is necessary. Community, familial as well as medical support systems all play a vital role in early intervention which aids in preventing an escalating situation that may require more extensive mental health services. As stated in the staff analysis, the screenings completed at the community hubs are consistent with those needed to properly assess an individual's overall physical and **mental** health. The letters of support shared with your MHSOAC commission are a clear indication that El Dorado County and its partners are on the right track. Are some hubs coming online more effectively than others? Yes. Are some as Ms. Nelson describe no more than a desk with brochures? In some instances, yes, however even that is changing as outreach efforts regarding the program continue to grow.

Community hubs are growing to be an integral part of the communities they serve and are helping build the community's resiliency. They are becoming a 'safe' place for families to go when they are experiencing a crisis resultant from a member undergoing some major behavioral changes. While we can acknowledge that there has been a rocky start to this program, we, the **majority** of El Dorado County Behavioral Health Commission agree that this innovative program is worthy of the \$2,158,704 in MHSA Innovation funds over an additional nine months in support of this project. By all accounts, the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors and many nongovernmental agencies agree with us. We, respectfully, ask that this body join us in this ongoing effort by approving this innovative project modification.

Respectfully submitted,

Norma Santiago

El Dorado County Behavioral Health Commission