



September 29, 2025

Kim Johnson
Secretary, California Health and Human Services Agency (CalHHS)
1215 O Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Behavioral Health Services Act (BHSA) Community Engagement

Dear Secretary Johnson,

On behalf of the Commission for Behavioral Health, I would like to thank you for your continued outreach and engagement efforts to reach California's most marginalized communities. Your commitment to listening to and involving the community is an essential part of our collective work to improve the behavioral health system. In that spirit, I am writing to share some important feedback the Commission received regarding the inclusion of community voices in the implementation of the BHSA. This input is crucial as we continue to shape a system that truly reflects the needs of those it is intended to serve.

During the Commission's August 28, 2025, meeting, we received significant public comment expressing concerns about the potential dilution of community voice, particularly from those representing marginalized communities, in the implementation of the BHSA.

Public commenters, both in person and virtually, highlighted a general distrust of government bodies and their ability to effectively legislate support, expand available services, and create safe spaces for these communities. Commenters cited challenges exacerbated by the current sociopolitical climate and emphasized the need for dedicated platforms that engage a wide range of communities, including rural residents, BIPOC individuals, LGBTQIA+ people, refugees, immigrants, and others with lived experience of SMI and SUD.

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While the work of the Commission is just one part of the broader commitment by state leaders to address the needs outlined above, we feel a shared responsibility to amplify the voices of our most marginalized populations. At the same August meeting, the Commission announced the newly formed Client, Family, and Community Inclusion, Lived Experience, and Diversity Advisory Committee, also referred to as the CFC Committee. This committee combines members from the previous Client and Family Leadership Committee and Cultural and Linguistic Competence Committee to provide an opportunity to streamline operations and improve committee coordination while also continuing to elevate and embed the diverse voices of individuals and families with lived experience. We look forward to the Committee's input on critical BHSA-related initiatives and invite our agency partners to collaborate with the Commission on the work of the Committee moving forward.

Additionally, we are committed to working closely with our agency partners to identify what more we can do to meaningfully engage communities in BHSA-related initiatives including:

- Driving innovation through our Innovation Partnership Fund, ensuring it is grounded in equity and lived experience, informed by a series of community listening sessions
- Aligning advocacy contracts to ensure they reach BHSA priority populations
- Consulting with the Department of Health Care Services on early intervention, full-service partnerships, and metrics, and with the Department of Public Health on population-based prevention strategies
- Hosting community conversations to educate and inform on key issues, such as the integration of peers into the behavioral health workforce.

The Commission serves as a key point of connection for those interested in improving behavioral health services in California. We invite continued collaboration and dialogue to advance these efforts and identify what more we can do together to respond to community feedback. This letter serves as a reaffirmation of our commitment to work closely with you to elevate community voice, share both our challenges and successes, and lead in service of the BHSA mission to transform and strengthen California's behavioral health system.



Together, we can create a system that truly serves the needs of the most marginalized Californians, improving the well-being of all of us. We look forward to working with you to make this vision a reality.

Thank you for your dedication, leadership and continued partnership.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mayra Alvarez". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Mayra E Alvarez

Chair, Commission for Behavioral Health

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brenda Grealish". The signature is in a cursive script.

Brenda Grealish

Executive Director, Commission for Behavioral Health

cc: Stephanie Welch, Deputy Secretary of Behavioral Health, CalHHS
Michelle Baass, Director, California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS)