

Innovation Incubator Evaluation Fact Sheet

- **Beginning in 2018, the Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission launched a \$5 million Innovation Incubator to provide targeted technical assistance, capacity building, and continuous quality improvement strategies to support the development and delivery of innovative approaches to improve mental health outcomes.**
- **The Commission is collecting information on successes, challenges, and ideas for system improvements on the projects funded by the Innovation Incubator. Data collection efforts include convenings of Incubator subject matter experts, a survey of county behavioral health staff, interviews with county partners and with clients and family members, and listening sessions and forums.**
- **The Commission will use the information gathered to identify and disseminate strategies with the potential for increasing the planning and delivery of innovative mental health approaches across the state.**

Transformational Change using Innovative Approaches

The Innovation component of the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) advances transformational change of the mental health system by providing vision and funding to test novel approaches that improve outcomes for all Californians. To promote an ecosystem that supports innovation, the Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission (the Commission) developed the Innovation Incubator. The Incubator was intended to support county efforts to build and implement novel strategies and provide guidance on the use of MHSA Innovation funds to develop, adapt, or refine more effective services and supports.

This approach deploys targeted technical assistance and facilitates learning among counties to bolster their ability to develop Innovation projects and build the capacity for system-level changes and continuous improvement. The Incubator was organized around the goal of helping counties use MHSA innovation funds to develop more effective strategies to reduce criminal justice involvement and related negative outcomes. Twenty-six counties participated in one or more of the projects, and scores of stakeholders contributed to a broader assessment of the innovation planning and approval process. You can find more information about these projects on the [Innovation Incubator webpage](#).

Case Study Evaluation

The Commission is evaluating the Innovation Incubator and identifying opportunities for applying key findings and lessons learned by counties. Given the experimental nature of the Incubator, the evaluation is based on a case study approach. The approach prioritizes gathering open-ended feedback on lessons learned from Incubator participation, as the primary goal of the Incubator was to learn rather than to meet pre-specified targets on outcome measures. Among the anticipated results, the evaluation seeks to identify strategic support the Commission and

partners could provide to counties to increase the development, implementation, and evaluation of innovative approaches to improving mental wellbeing. The evaluation relies mostly on qualitative data collected from individuals involved in the Innovation Incubator, such as contractors, county representatives, and advocates and stakeholders, including people with lived experience and their family members. Key data collection strategies are highlighted below.

- The Commission held two virtual convenings of Innovation Incubator contractors, county and state representatives, and other partners to identify and discuss the factors and conditions that made the technical assistance, capacity building, and continuous improvement strategies of Incubator projects successful.
- In October 2021, Commission staff sent an invitation to county representatives involved in Incubator projects, requesting that they complete an online survey designed to gather insights on the kinds of support and technical assistance that were most useful to them.
- Beginning in December 2021 and through February 2022, Commission staff are conducting interviews with county representatives to expand upon survey results, as well as interviews with clients and family members who participated in Incubator projects.
- Beginning in December 2021, Commission staff will also facilitate listening sessions with community members, including clients of mental health services, their families, and advocates, to explore improvements in local innovation ideation, implementation, and learning dissemination.

Dissemination of Findings

Several efforts are currently underway to understand the outcomes of the Innovation Incubator. These efforts are focused on gathering insights about the key lessons learned through Incubator projects and broader findings about how the State can best support counties in innovative work. Commission staff are prioritizing engagement with a wide audience of stakeholders to ensure the outcomes of the evaluation are practical and useful.

As the Incubator evaluation moves forward, staff are also developing a strategy to evaluate innovation more broadly. The aim is to build both innovation and evaluation into all the work happening at the Commission, leading to transformational change of the mental health system and greater wellbeing for all Californians.

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