

Improving Capacity to Achieve Behavioral Health Equity in Sacramento County

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Problem Statement:

In the 1999 report, “Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General”, it was noted that Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) have poorer access to behavioral health care than whites and receive poorer quality care.¹ For the past 5 years, the California Institute for Behavioral Health Solutions (CIBHS) has worked with the Sacramento County Division of Behavioral Health Services (BHS) to advance behavioral health equity and increase the cultural competence of behavioral health services.

While many trainings have occurred and the evaluations demonstrated positive responses from participants, the County would like to focus more in the current year on advancing behavioral health equity. Cultural competence training attempts to ensure providers gain knowledge of different cultural practices and the skills needed to communicate and interact effectively across cultures. Behavioral health equity, on the other hand, means that everyone gets what they need so they have a fair chance and opportunity to live a life of optimal emotional health and wellness. While behavioral health inequity is caused by disparities in social determinants of health, such as housing, education and income level that disproportionately impact BIPOC, it is important to also recognize that these disparities are, at core, caused by racism. Structural racism, the complex interplay of public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and norms, creates the racial inequities we observe in social determinants of health. The resulting poverty, limited employment, inadequate health services, unsafe streets, and chronic stress lead to increased incidence of anxiety, depression, substance use, and other behavioral health symptoms among BIPOC. Therefore, creating opportunities for optimal emotional health and wellness requires not just improving provider skills to interact more effectively with other communities, but also intentionally partnering with communities to identify and address racial inequities that create behavioral health inequities.²

Solution:

A Sacramento County Behavioral Health Racial Equity Collaborative (BHREC) will be established to bring together key stakeholders of the Sacramento County behavioral health system to build Racial Equity Action Plans (BHREC Action Plans) to improve behavioral health outcomes in the Sacramento community. The core goals of the BHREC Action Plans will be determined during

¹ Taken From: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3928067/>

² Taken From: <https://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/Health%20Care%20and%20the%20Competitive%20Advantage%20of%20Racial%20Equity.pdf>

the Collaborative through various strategies, including a survey of the community, focus groups and analysis of already existing Sacramento and state level data. All organizational members of the BHREC will create their own BHREC Action Plan, each using their own strategies to achieve the shared behavioral health equity goals of the BHREC. This Collaborative will serve as a pilot so that BHS and its providers can learn how to work effectively in communities to achieve equity.

While strides have been made to create a foundation for a relationship between BHS, its providers and the African American/Black community, the development of an authentic and meaningful partnership with a shared vision and strategies for racial and behavioral health equity still requires additional targeted efforts. Sac County BHS will use the BHREC Pilot to learn how to more effectively partner with racial communities to create clear, shared action plans for behavioral health and racial equity that can be adapted and replicated with other community groups.

The BHREC will be guided by a Steering Committee of 20 members. Half of the members are from Sacramento County BHS and the other half are individuals representing stakeholders from the Sacramento African American/Black Community. The Steering Committee will have a core role in the design of the BHREC as well as the shaping of the BHREC Action Plan goals.

They will:

- Create a vision and values statement for the BHREC;
- Review and assist in the analysis of data from a community survey, focus groups and county and state level reports that will inform the goals and measures of success of the BHREC Action Plans;
- Help Sacramento County DHBS to identify strategies to increase meaningful relationships with the African American/Black community;
- Create institutional accountability and urgency for change; and
- Support Sacramento County BHS in using racial equity tools to help assess the impact of BHREC on the community.