

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

San Mateo County Health System: Behavioral Health & Recovery Services

A Primary Prevention Framework for Substance Abuse and Mental Health

March 2009



Prevention Institute
facilitated this planning
process and authored
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Introduction

San Mateo County Health System Behavioral Health & Recovery Services is dedicated to promoting wellness, resilience, and recovery so that all San Mateo County residents can live fully as contributing and successful individuals and members of their families and communities. As part of this commitment, BHRS is dedicated not only to treating and serving those in need, but also to reducing the number of people who may need services in the first place. *For, this reason, Behavioral Health & Recovery Services has developed a Primary Prevention Framework.*

A primary prevention approach means taking action *before* behavioral health problems occur, rather than waiting to intervene after symptoms appear or incidents occur. This approach requires looking at the role that the social, physical, economic, and cultural environments play in contributing to behavioral health problems and how those environments can be changed to prevent some behavioral health problems from occurring in the first place. This framework is meant to influence public policy and organizational practices in order to promote the emotional, psychological, and physical well-being of San Mateo County residents with particular emphasis on individuals and communities at risk.

Principles for Planning & Implementation

This prevention framework complements other county initiatives aimed at treatment and services, by specifically articulating the strategies and actions that can prevent people from needing services in the first place, while supporting all people in the community in achieving positive well-

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being. The Planning Committee (see Appendix B) developed the following principles to help guide the process for the planning, development, and implementation of the framework:

- Behavioral health is integral to individual health and community well-being.
- Our cultural diversity is a strength that must be accounted for and utilized in our approach.
- The participation and input from community members, including persons receiving behavioral health services and their families, should inform our efforts and community voice should be honored.
- Where people live, work, learn, play, worship, and interact—and the social connections that emerge in these settings—influence wellness in general and behavioral health specifically.
- The policies, decisions, and actions of public and private organizations, institutions, and workplaces impact behavioral health outcomes.
- Strategies must be inclusive of all those living in San Mateo County, regardless of race, ethnicity, language, nationality, age, gender, sexual orientation, or presence of behavioral health conditions.
- Partnering with related community efforts facilitates the achievement of our outcomes.
- Stigma reduction and striving for its elimination is central to all strategies.
- Focusing on the principal risk and resiliency factors will yield the best results.
- Focusing on strategies that work at the organizational practice and policy levels will reach the greatest number of people and can help prevent behavioral health problems *before* they occur.

Strategy Outcomes

This framework identifies four prevention strategies that can stem the flow of people needing intensive behavioral health services. These strategies focus on 1) enhancing place, 2) connecting people, 3) fostering prosperity, and 4) expanding partnerships.

STRATEGY 1: Enhance Place Enhance the places people live, work, play, go to school, worship, and socialize to support emotional and psychological health, reduce substance abuse, and decrease exposure to violence.

Outcomes for Enhancing Place

- Decreased availability of alcohol and other drugs
- Stable housing
- Safety
- Physical environments that support social connection

STRATEGY 2: Connect People Strengthen positive social-emotional development, enhance social connections, and reduce isolation to support emotional health, promote psychological well-being, reduce substance abuse, and decrease exposure to violence.

Outcomes for Connecting People

- Reduced exposure to violence for children and youth
- Quality environments for children and youth
- Supported families
- Supportive workplaces
- Community connections and relationships
- Older adults are actively engaged in the community

STRATEGY 3: Foster Prosperity Reduce stigma and enhance economic opportunity and self-sufficiency, especially for those most at risk for mental health problems and substance abuse.

Outcomes for Fostering Prosperity

- Reduced stigma
- Economic self-sufficiency

STRATEGY 4: Expand Partnerships Engage multiple government sectors, businesses, and community members—including consumers, clients, and family members—in enhancing places, strengthening connections among people, and fostering prosperity to improve emotional health, promote mental well-being, reduce substance abuse, and decrease exposure to violence, through their actions, decisions, practices, and policies.

Outcomes for Expanding Partnerships

- Engaged government sector
- Engaged business community
- Engaged community members

Conclusion

Applying a primary prevention framework to behavioral health can help prevent certain conditions, reduce or delay onset and severity of symptoms, and promote positive well-being for all. San Mateo County Health System Behavioral Health & Recovery Services will continue to pave the way for other counties throughout California, and the country, by identifying partners, opportunities, and resources to put this framework into action for all county residents.